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# retro GAMER

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THE DEFINITIVE VERDICT ON THIS POWERFUL PORTABLE SYSTEM

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THE BARGAINS TO LOOK FOR ON NINTENDO'S HANDHELD

# PILOTWINGS

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF RARE'S DIGITAL AMPHIBIANS

## THE MAKING OF LOTR: THE RETURN OF THE KING
INSIDE ELECTRONIC ARTS' ADAPTATION OF PETER JACKSON'S OSCAR-WINNING MOVIE

## THE TOP GEAR TRILOGY
HOW GREMLIN SOUPED UP THE SNES RACING SCENE

HOMEBREW SPECIAL
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# LOADING...

**I can still remember my first encounter with our cover game *Pilotwings*.** I was visiting my best mate Paul Staddon because he had a Super Famicom and a number of games for it, including *Super Mario World* and *F-Zero*. Both were superb, but *Pilotwings* really stood out for me because it looked like nothing I had ever seen on a home system before.

Seeing *Pilotwings*' levels scale and rotate as you completed tasks felt like witchcraft and I knew right then that I had to own Nintendo's console. It proved to be a solid purchase and even though it wasn't always the best system for shmups, I nevertheless built up an impressive library of games, many of which pushed the technological limits of the console.

Thirty years ago in 1992, European gamers got to experience Nintendo's console for themselves, so we felt it was the perfect opportunity to highlight 30 games that truly pushed the system. We've also asked a number of developers to reveal the SNES games that impressed them, and there's even a *Pilotwings* Ultimate Guide.

There's plenty more to enjoy in the first issue of 2022. We've a feature looking at the greatest C64 games of all time, we quiz a number of Rare developers about the *Battletoads* series and go behind the scenes of Gremlin's *Top Gear* games and Electronic Arts' *The Return Of The King*. We've even found time to showcase the best games you can play on the Spectrum Next.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine,
Darran

## THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S THE MOST TECHNICALLY IMPRESSIVE SNES GAME YOU'VE PLAYED?

### DARRAN JONES

I'm going to go with Compile's *Super Aleste*. It's an astonishing shmup that proves the SNES was more than capable of throwing lots of sprites about the screen with little slowdown.
**Expertise:** Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful daughters and an award-winning mag, all under one roof!
**Currently playing:** *Guardians Of The Galaxy*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Strider*

### TIM EMPEY

*Street Fighter II*. I spent a lot of money in the arcades on this and it looked near identical on the SNES, but I didn't have one. I did have the Amiga version though, but well, you know…
**Expertise:** Finishing Game Pass games before they leave the service
**Currently playing:** *Halo Infinite*
**Favourite game of all time:** *God Hand*

### NICK THORPE

I was firmly in the Mega Drive camp as a kid, but that didn't diminish my excitement when I learned my cousin had *Donkey Kong Country* – it was just on another level, visually.
**Expertise:** Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
**Currently playing:** *Omikron: The Nomad Soul*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Sonic The Hedgehog*

### ANDY SALTER

I'm generally not a fan of racing games but *Super Mario Kart* is probably my favourite SNES game of all time.
**Expertise:** Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
**Currently playing:** *M&B2: Bannerlord…* Modded of course
**Favourite game of all time:** *Rome: Total War*

### PAUL ROSE

The first SNES game to blow me away was my first SNES game: *Super Mario World* – the second I heard the echoey sound during the first cave level.
**Expertise:** Winging it
**Currently playing:** *Mini Motorways*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Half-Life 2*

### PAUL DRURY

The first time I skydived in *Pilotwings* was revelatory – this machine was a serious piece of kit.
**Expertise:** Nintendo Switch physical releases
**Currently playing:** *Super Monkey Ball: Banana Mania*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Sheep In Space*

### ASHLEY DAY

It has to be *Starwing*. I couldn't even imagine a game like that at the time, and as a Mega Drive owner it made me super jealous of my SNES-owning friends.
**Expertise:** Buying MSX games like they're going out of fashion
**Currently playing:** *Ys: The Oath In Felghana*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Shining Force III*

### RORY MILNE

I remember *Donkey Kong Country* being a revelation. Its CGI visuals looked stunning, in part because clever coding allowed them to be rendered in 4,096 colours instead of the standard 256.
**Expertise:** The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
**Currently playing:** *WipEout*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Tempest*

### JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

*Skyblazer*. From the start it was filled with multiple transparencies, Mode 7 bosses which changed size and rotated, 3D flying sections, curving backgrounds and richly detailed sprites. It constantly managed to impress me.
**Expertise:** Everything Japanese and anything obscure
**Currently Playing:** *Indiana Jones And The Infernal Machine*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Cave Story*

# CONTENTS

**>> Load** 229 Breathing new life into classic games

## RETRO RADAR


06 **Main News**
We pay tribute to Masayuki Uemura, creator of the NES and SNES, Psygnosis' Ian Hetherington and Namco's Hiroshi Ono

08 **News Wall**
Steve Cottam explains how Antstream is being improved and reveals its brand-new selection of MSX games

10 **Iain Lee**
Watching *The Adventure Game* has inspired Iain to track someone down for a chat

12 **Mr Biffo**
Paul is feeling his age and decided it's time to revisit the strategy genre

14 **A Moment With**
We chat to Ally Hogg who runs The Retro Hunter and co-owns Neon Knights

16 **Back To The Noughties**
Darran's useless at keeping the DeLorean fuelled, so Nick's on travel duties again

18 **BB4CPC**
If only this fantastic homebrew release had existed in 1987

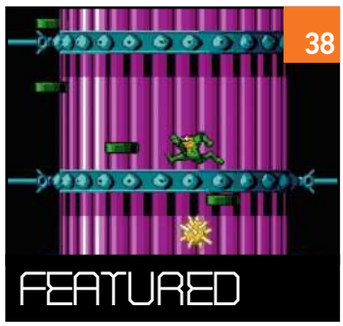
36 **Contra**
Darran recalls discovering Konami's boisterous run-and-gun in a chip shop

54 **Road Avenger**
Nick loves anime so he really enjoyed discovering this Mega-CD conversion

82 **No One Can Stop Mr Domino**
It's an unusual game but it's one that means quite a lot to Nick

96 **Super Mario 64 DS**
Darran revisits his favourite minigame from Nintendo's fun DS remake

112 **Excite Truck**
That's right, the Wii is retro. "Welcome to the party, pal," as John McClane would say



38 **The Evolution Of: Battletoads**
Rory Milne chats to Kevin Bayliss, Paul Machacek and AJ Grand-Scutton about Rare's crazy amphibians

44 **Hardware Heaven: SG-1000**
Nick picked up this Japanese console a while ago and has been looking for an excuse to cover it

46 **Retro Gamer's Guide To: Commodore 64**
Commodore's 8-bit computer is now 40 years old, so it felt like the perfect time to revisit the system in this legacy article

60 **The Making Of: Gravity**
Richard Hewison quizzes Ross Goodley about his ambitious strategy game for the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST

66 **Classic Moments: Head Over Heels**
With the sad passing of Bernie Drummond we felt it was only right to look back at one of the best games he was involved with

74 **Retro Inspired: Clockwork Aquario**
Ryuichi Nishizawa explains how a lost arcade game from the Nineties was resurrected for modern consoles

84 **So You Want To Collect... Game Boy Advance Games**
Ashley Day returns with another selection of games to kick-start your collection. Be warned, some of these are expensive!

88 **Peripheral Vision: LCD Screen**
The only thing cuter than Sony's revision of the original PlayStation was this rather smart LCD screen you could buy for it

90 **The Making Of: The Lord Of The Rings: The Return Of The King**
Aaron Potter discovers how Electronic Arts drafted a star team of coders to create its ambitious sequel to Peter Jackson's hit film

**Super-Powered: 30 Games That Pushed The Limits Of The SNES**
Nintendo's console celebrates its 30th anniversary in Europe this year, so we decided to reveal the games that pushed the system, while asking devs to name their personal favourites

**Ultimate Guide: Pilotwings**
John Szczepaniak reveals the interesting history behind this ambitious SNES classic

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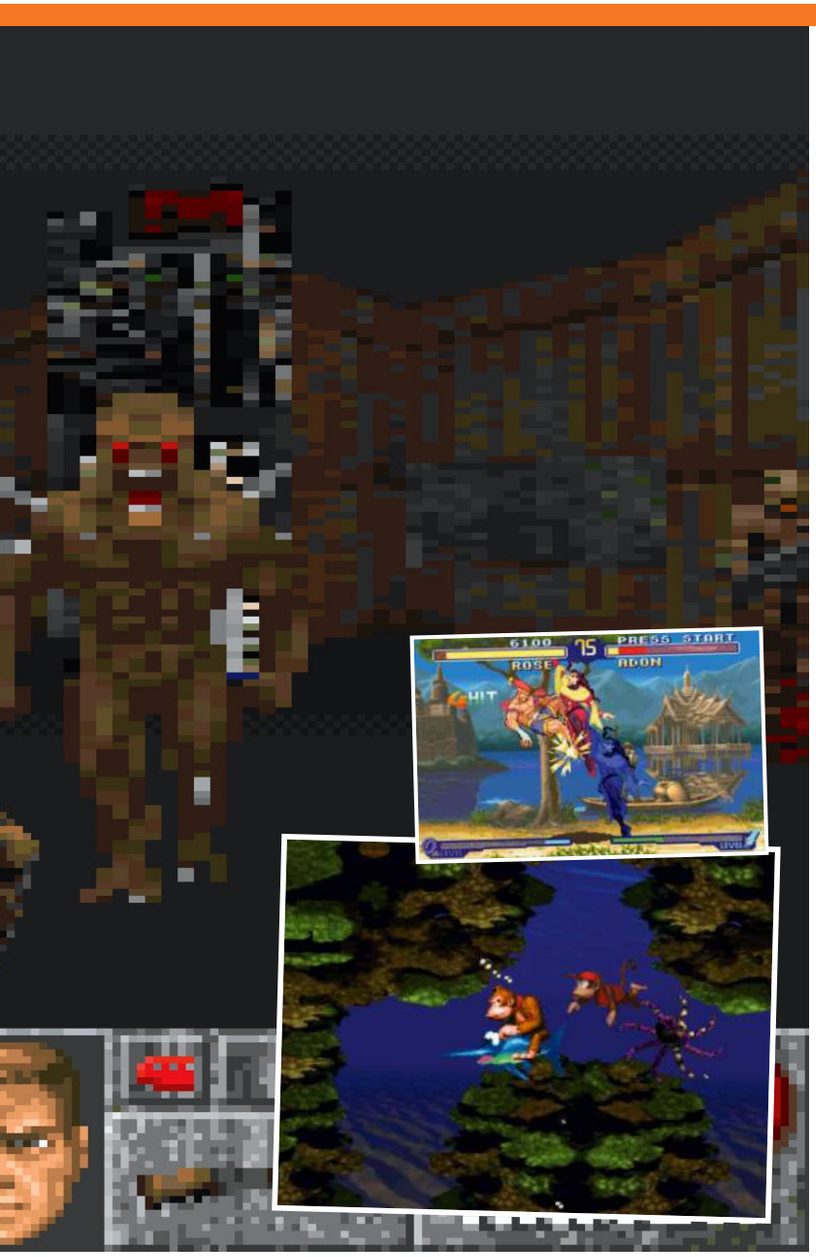
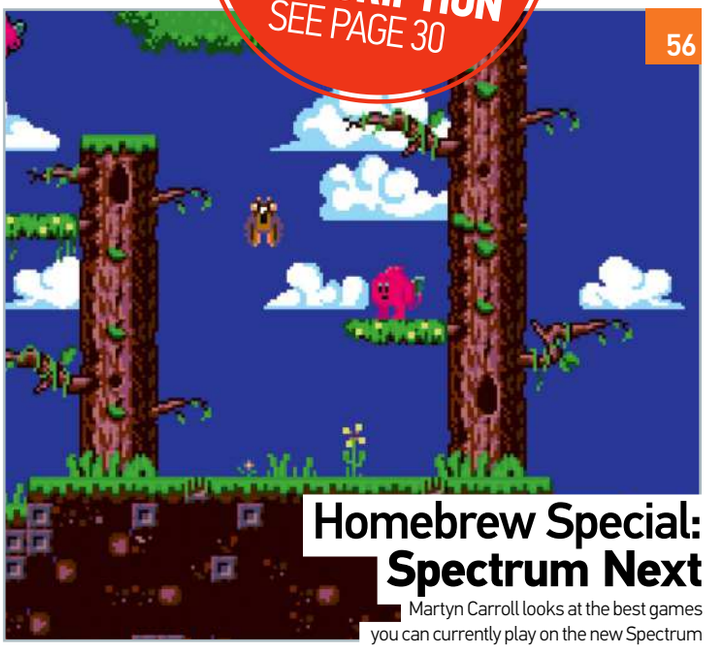




56

## Homebrew Special: Spectrum Next

Martyn Carroll looks at the best games you can currently play on the new Spectrum

76

## The Making Of: Gargoyles

## REVIEWS

98 Analogue Pocket

100 Evercade Multi Game Cartridges

100 The Little Book Of Sound Chips: Volume 1: 1977-1981

100 Clockwork Aquario

100 Lemmings: Can You Dig it?

## ESSENTIALS

30 **Subscriptions**
More mesmerising than witnessing Mode 7 in action for the very first time

102 **Hot Topic: Downers And Disappointments**
Being a *Sonic* fan, Nick's used to disappointment, but Darran and Tim have had gaming upsets too

104 **Collector's Corner**
This month we were lucky enough to be invited into Matt Taylor's game room. He even gave us pointers for Bargain Hunt

106 **My Retro Life**
Darran explains how Microsoft's first console led to him editing the very mag you're now reading

108 **Mailbag**
It's the start of 2022 and we're overjoyed with the amount of letters we're receiving. Keep them coming please

114 **Endgame**
Darran wrote this month's entry, so if you don't find it very funny you know exactly who to blame

68

## The Making Of: Gremlin's Top Gear Games

Ritchie Brannan and Ashley Bennett reminisce about working on these early racing games for KEMCO

» Masayuki Uemura, speaking about his career at the National Videogame Museum in 2016.

Photo credit: Matt Taylor

# PIONEERS PASS AWAY

## Gaming loses more talented individuals that shaped the business

CONTENTS

**6 PIONEERS PASS AWAY**
We pay tribute to Hiroshi Ono, Masayuki Uemura and Ian Hetherington

**8 IAIN LEE**
This month, Iain has been enjoying *The Adventure Game*

**10 MR BIFFO**
Do you remember the Spectrum classic *Shadowfire*? Paul does

**12 A MOMENT WITH**
We chat to Ally Hogg who runs The Retro Hunter store

**14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES**
Nick continues travelling through time and lands in April 2005

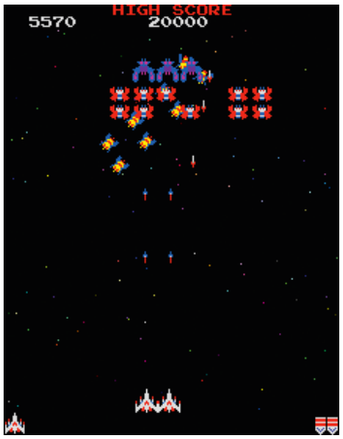
**In 2021, we celebrated 50 years of the commercial videogame industry, and with that milestone comes the sobering reality that many of the pioneering creators that have built the games we love have reached an advanced age.** We recently learned of three major figures in the industry that have passed away. Hiroshi Ono passed away on 16 October at the age of 64, Masayuki Uemura passed away on 6 December aged 78, and Ian Hetherington passed on 14 December at 69.

Hiroshi Ono was an artist who joined Namco in 1979, and became known as Mr Dotman for his skill in creating pixel art. Many of the company's early arcade hits featured his work, including the likes of *Dig Dug*, *Galaga* and *Xevious*. Ono would remain with Namco until going freelance in 2013, after which he contributed to a variety of games including *Cosmic Cavern 3671*. In 2020 Ono revealed that an illness had taken most of his mobility, and that many of his early Namco artworks had been stolen in a burglary at his storage facility. A Japanese crowdfunding effort was set up earlier in 2021 in order to create a documentary about Ono's life and work, and successfully reached its goal. The producers have since confirmed that the project will continue. Many of Ono's colleagues in the industry have paid tribute, including Yuzo Koshiro, who posted some of Ono's work on Twitter with the message, "My daughter found this and said with a smile a while back, 'I love the red cat. So cute!' I was impressed his pixel arts didn't only inspire my generation strongly but also stood the test of time. I know they will all miss you too… RIP Hiroshi Ono-san aka Mr Dotman."

> "I was impressed his pixel arts didn't only inspire my generation strongly but also stood the test of time"
> **YUZO KOSHIRO**

Masayuki Uemura joined Nintendo from Sharp in 1971, where he initially worked on lightgun games for the arcade and home markets. He became the head of the company's R&D2 division, where he would work on the early Color TV-Game systems. However, Uemura's most influential products would be Nintendo's cartridge-based home videogame consoles. Despite a shaky start due to

» [Arcade] *Dig Dug* was one of the many iconic games with pixel art by the late Hiroshi Ono.




» [Arcade] Hiroshi Ono would move away from creating pixel art after the Eighties, but returned during the mobile gaming boom.

» [NES] As well as working on hardware, Masayuki Uemura was the producer of games including *Ice Climber*.

hardware problems, the Famicom would go on to dominate the Japanese console market for years following its 1983 release. After a redesign aimed at making the system look less like a console, the 8-bit hardware was test launched as the Nintendo Entertainment System in the USA in 1985, and soon drove a revival of a market that retailers and other businesses had written off as a passing fad. That success led to the creation of a 16-bit successor, the SNES, which would go on to achieve great success of its own and played host to an incredible library of games. Combined, the two consoles would sell over 110 million units.

Uemura would remain with Nintendo until 2004, although he had an advisory role with the hardware team in the years that followed. He would go on to become a professor by special appointment at Ritsumeikan University, where he served as the director of its Centre For Game Studies. Tributes to Uemura have come from far and wide, including the National Videogame Museum in Sheffield. "The team at the National Videogame Museum is devastated to hear the news today that Masayuki Uemura has passed away," read a statement on the museum's Twitter account. "Uemura-sensei generously dedicated so much of his time to the museum, most recently visiting us at our launch of the Videogame Heritage Society in February 2020."

» Ian Hetherington, pictured during the formation of Real Time Worlds.

Ian Hetherington was a cofounder of Imagine Software in 1982, where he served as the company's financial director. Although that company suffered a swift and highly public downfall in 1984, Ian was undeterred and cofounded Psygnosis. The company went on to be highly successful, publishing games including *Shadow Of The Beast*, *Lemmings* and *WipEout*, and was purchased by Sony in 1993. Ian would leave Psygnosis in 1998 and cofounded Evolution Studios with Martin Kenwright. Evolution Studios was primarily known for developing the *World Rally Championship* games for PlayStation 2, and had launched *Motorstorm* for the PlayStation 3 when Ian left in 2007. He would subsequently hold senior roles at other gaming companies including Real Time Worlds.

Tributes to Ian have been plentiful since the news of his passing. *WipEout* designer Nick Burcombe tweeted, "Sad news today about the passing of UK development legend, Ian Hetherington. He steered so many of my Psygnosis friends and colleagues through the 16 and 32-bit eras and into the arms of Playstation. #wipeout fans, it was Ian's leadership that made it happen. #respect." Richard Browne of Digital Extremes said, "Absolutely shocked and devastated to hear of the passing of Ian Hetherington today. Thirty years ago he gave me the wonderful opportunity to be a part of the games industry legend that is Psygnosis; it is a time I still look back on as some of the best moments of my life." Former Bizarre Creations head Martyn Chudley tweeted, "Oh wow – I've just heard the news about Ian Hetherington… this is truly shocking. It was Ian who gave me my big break into the games industry back in '88 – a true legend. Ian can rightly claim to have been a huge piece of gaming history. He'll be missed…"

Our thoughts go out to the families and friends of all three men. ✱

» [Amiga] Psygnosis built its success on a variety of excellent 16-bit computer games, including *Lemmings*.

## EGRET II MINI HEADS WEST

We've been eagerly awaiting the release of Taito's Egret II Mini, but we were worried that it might remain an import exclusive. Thankfully, it has now been announced that it'll be coming to North America and Europe this year via Inin Games and Strictly Limited Games. The miniature arcade cabinet features 40 built-in games including *Space Invaders*, *Bubble Bobble*, *The New Zealand Story* and *Elevator Action Returns*, a rotating 4:3 display and HDMI output. The unit also has the ability to add extra games, with the likes of *Arkanoid* and *Puchi Carat* included with the paddle and trackball controller kit. We can't wait.

## SPEEDY 64

Sonic has occasionally been known to travel through time on his adventures, and homebrew coder Mr SID has brought Sega's mascot back to the Eighties with a Commodore 64 port of the first Master System game. Stages, bosses and secrets all come across intact, and the tunes by Yuzo Koshiro have been faithfully translated to the SID chip. You'll need a 256KB RAM expansion unit to play it on original hardware, but it will also work on the C64 Mini and its full-sized brother as well as various emulators. Download the disk image at https://csdb.dk

## BLAZE ANNOUNCES A NEW EVERCADE COLLECTION

Many of you will have no doubt received your Evercade VS by now, but Blaze Entertainment certainly isn't resting on its laurels. We already knew that a collection of games owned by Renovation was on the way, but Blaze has also revealed that a Gremlin Graphics collection is currently in the works with a planned release for March. The six-game collection includes *Zool*, *Premier Manager 97*, *Actua Soccer*, *Utopia*, *Brain Bender* and *Hardcore 4X4*. It's not the most exciting selection of games, but the pricing seems reasonable, even at the new higher price of £17.99, which is the new price for all existing carts as well.

## THE ASTRO CITY MINI GETS UPDATED

It would appear that the arcade rivalries of the Eighties and Nineties are still going strong today. Last year, Taito announced a new mini arcade cabinet that would include a rotatable screen for tate games. Sega has now shot back with a similar cabinet called the Astro City Mini V. Although it lacks a rotatable screen, it is designed for vertical games and the library of 22 titles includes some exceptional shmups, including *Batsugan*, *Raiden*, *Truxton 2* and *Armed Police Batrider*. It's currently planned as a Japan exclusive, but hopefully it will make its way to the UK like the original Astro City Mini did.

# ANTSTREAM POWERS UP

### STEVE COTTAM ON UPGRADING THE CLOUD-BASED STREAMING SERVICE

» [PC] Menus and presentation are slick and the service now has useful options like save states should you wish to use them.

**Antstream has come a long way since it made its debut and it has quickly become the go-to place for playing classic retro games online.** While we had issues with certain aspects of the service when it first launched, there's no denying how responsive it feels to play games online now and improvements are continually being made to the service. Numerous competitions are in place too, ensuring there's plenty of entertainment to be had for those that have subscribed. Games are continually getting added as well, and one of the more unusual additions is the planned MSX games that are being added.

» Antstream's CEO Steve Cottam is pleased with the progress the streaming platform is making.

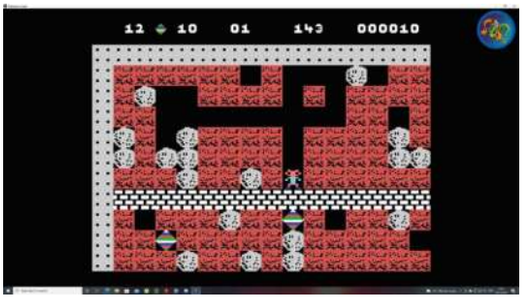
However, as Antstream's CEO Steve Cottam tells us, the inclusion of MSX games makes perfect sense when you look at the larger picture. "Antstream is a global gaming service and while the MSX was not hugely popular in the UK, in other territories such as Japan and Brazil, it was a major part of the gaming ecosystem," Steve tells us. "The MSX system was actually the machine I first learnt to code Z80, so it holds a special place in my heart as it set me on a path that ultimately led to the creation of Antstream Arcade. It is an absolute privilege to be entrusted with the MSX brand for cloud streaming."

And in all fairness, it seems like cloud streaming has proven to be extremely successful for Steve and the rest of his team, with a user base that has grown by an impressive 600% in the last 12 months. We were keen to know how the team has been able to cultivate such an impressive base. "Our entire team is passionate about retro and I think that really shines through in the product," continues Steve. "We are making something that we, as retro gaming fans and collectors, want to play. It has been a tough journey that has taken a lot of persistence, but I think our partners and the fans understand we really care that these games are available for everyone to enjoy."

We'd argue that one of the big successes of Antstream is the sheer amount of recognised games available on its service, many of which are licensed by some of the bigger names in the industry, including SNK, Taito and Namco. How tricky has it been getting publishers to commit to Antstream? "Actually getting licences can be incredibly difficult," admits Steve. "While the rights to games like *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders* are easy enough to locate, the rights to many classic titles have changed hands so many times over the years that many games are held by businesses that aren't even aware they are holding them."

This has meant a lot of rights investigations behind the scenes, but Steve is confident the dedication has been worth it. "Thanks to some dogged persistence from our team, we've been able to add more than 1,200 games to the platform, with the licences to thousands more to be added in the future," he tells us. "As an example of our persistence, we are about to add a batch of games to the platform that has taken over five years to track down the rights and negotiate with the owners."

We can't wait to experience them and we'll have a bigger article on Antstream later in the year. In the meantime you can enjoy the service yourself by heading over to antstream.com ✱



» [PC] The only MSX game we could find as we went to press was *Boulder Dash*, but Compile's *Super Cooks*, *Neo Golvellius* and others should be available shortly.

» [PC] One thing we love about Antstream is how it celebrates home computers, including the Amiga, Commodore 64 and ZX Spectrum.

» [PC] Fast-moving games still suffer from compression, but it's less noticeable than in the past.

» [PC] Another thing that's cool about Antstream is its focus on competitive play and numerous competitions.

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NAP202ICN

**Who is Iain Lee?**
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainandKatherine

# Right said Fred

**host an online show.** I stream on a mixture of Twitch and YouTube, the latter being exclusive to my Patreons. Quite often on the show a forgotten TV programme or song or presenter will pop into my head and I'll start digging around on YouTube trying to find clips. My recently diagnosed ADHD often means I'll stick with a video for only a few minutes before jumping off onto something else.

Last week I was watching old game shows with my audience. We started with *Take Your Pick*, moved to *Sale Of The Century*, had a sniff of *Gambit* and then landed on *The Adventure Game*. Gronda gronda indeed! If you never saw it, it was a very slow version of *The Crystal Maze* about 15 years before that show started. Two celebrities and a civilian would be locked in a room and have puzzles to solve. It was basically the precursor to escape rooms (which I love by the way. Why aren't there any decent VR escape room games?) and our heroes (quite often Richard Stilgoe and Maggie Philbin) would plod their way through some of the most migraine-inducing puzzles. Then, to escape the planet, they had to clear The Vortex.

What has this got to do with computer games, Iain? Quite a lot actually, so sit down and listen. I'd forgotten that a lot of the graphics for the show were actually done using a BBC Micro. You'd see shots of space and they were from the Beeb! At the start you got a glimpse of the *Pac-Man* rip-off, *Snapper*. All of this stuff at the time, I'd say about 1982, was AMAZING for kids because computers were never on telly. Certainly not for the fun bits.

But here's the point. The episode I watched had Fred Harris in it. Allow that name to bounce around your brain for a while. My prediction is half of you have no clue, the other half now have a warm fuzzy glow in your hearts. I hadn't thought about Fred for years, and suddenly, it all came flooding back to me.

Fred, Ian McNaught-Davis and to a lesser extent Lesley Judd, were the faces of computing WAY before Patrick Moore. The tank-top-wearing Fred always had a slightly naughty vibe to him. Ian and Lesley were very matter of fact but I always got the feeling Fred was winking at me as if to say, "God, they're making me do this in such a straight way, but really, this stuff is super cool."

Now here's the weird thing. I hadn't thought about Fred in years. I stumble across him on my stream. The next day, I'm in the car with my nine-year-old kid. I'm bored of listening to Ed Sheeran so I do what I never do with my boys in the car, I turn over to BBC Radio 4 Extra. And do you know who I hear on there?

Fred bloomin' Harris.

That's nuts, right? He was talking about a comedy show he'd been in. I sat there gobsmacked. And an idea formed… I am going to find Fred Harris, and I am going to interview him. Maybe for **Retro Gamer**, maybe for my show, who knows? But I WILL get answers. Doog yrev! *

> "God, they're making me do this in such a straight way, but really, this stuff is super cool"

**Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:**

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**Who is Paul Rose?**
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

# A new strategy

**Do you remember a game called *Shadowfire*?** It was a Spectrum game initially, point-and-click strategy, albeit without a mouse. It was incredibly tough, I never really felt I had a handle on it, and yet… it was released the year after teenage me lost two close family members. Oddly, it really helped me through that time.

Without wishing to go into masses of detail, the past six months have been among the toughest of my life, and I've found myself kind of reckoning with my own mortality.

My parents – and there's no real way of sugar-coating this – are reaching the end of their lives. Both are in their 80s, and neither is in the best of health. My relationship with them has changed in the past year, in as much as they're becoming more and more dependent on my sisters and I for assistance. Furthermore, my day job has been absolutely battered by COVID, and it feels like my career – and income – has dropped off a cliff. More happily, by the time you read this column, it's highly likely I will have become a grandfather.

Both good and bad, it's all rather a lot of big stuff that we're wrestling with, and it feels like I'm moving into a new phase of life, one where I'm one of the most senior members of the family.

I always wondered, when I was younger, whether I'd still be playing videogames when I was an old man. In the eyes of that younger me, I am what now would be considered an old man. A grey-bearded grandfather.

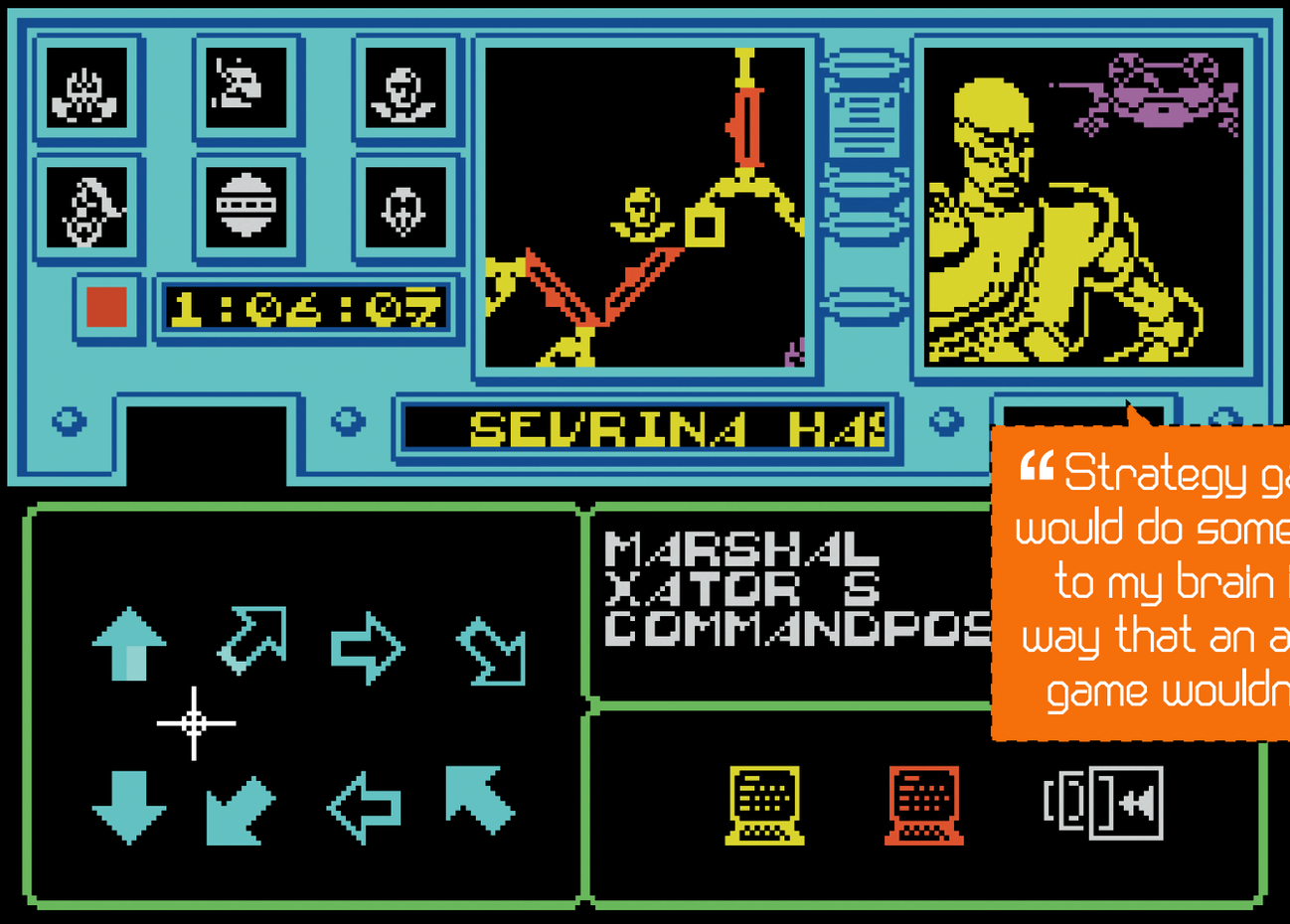
And what I'm finding really interesting is that – yes – I am still playing games, but my taste feels like it's shifting, ever so slightly. I'm finding myself seeking out genres that I haven't played in years. Namely – hello, *Shadowfire* – strategy games.

There was a time when *Command & Conquer* was my go-to franchise, but somewhere along the way I gave it all up for the more visceral, in-your-face, thrills of the first-person shooter. Of late, I've wasted entire days on *Civilization VI*.

Going right back to *Lords Of Midnight*, to *Populous*, through *Herzog Zwei* on the Mega Drive, and *Warcraft III*… strategy games would do something to my brain in a way that an action game wouldn't. Perhaps it was because I was forced to use a less-emotional side of myself, I always got more lost in them. And that's exactly what I need, during what has been a very emotional and trying year. Or two.

It has giving me breathing room to let big life events filter through and process at a somewhat more manageable rate. I've been able to hang onto some greater sense of self than I otherwise would, because I've had these hours where my emotions effectively get parked off to one side.

Moving forwards, maybe it's time to dig out some of those classics again. Maybe it's time I reopened the Tiberium mines. *




> "Strategy games would do something to my brain in a way that an action game wouldn't"

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# The Retro Hunter

Retro Gamer pops to Leigh-On-Sea, Essex, to chat with Ally Hogg, owner of The Retro Hunter store and co-owner of the Neon Knights arcade

**Running a retro gaming shop in today's market certainly isn't easy, but Ally Hogg has done an impressive job in the last few years.** In fact, The Retro Hunter store has proven to be such a success, Ally has also branched out into running an arcade as well. Here, he tells us how it all happened.

**How did the name The Retro Hunter come about?**
I was a collector for many years and used to post pictures on Twitter of all the things I'd found. Back then, I didn't have anything so it was all new to me, and someone said I was like 'The Retro Hunter'. I liked that, so I took it as my Twitter handle.

**And how did this turn into a business, buying and selling videogames and consoles?**
I started to realise that stuff was worth more than what people were selling it for. This was about ten or so years ago when boot sales were very different to what they are now. But I didn't save the money initially, I just spent it on my collection. Then I started to hoard stuff because in the back of my head was the idea that I'd love to have my own shop one day and sell from it. I didn't want to leave a well-paid job in London and start with nothing, as I thought I would need a reserve behind me in case things didn't go well, so I started doing trade shows up and down the country. Play Margate was the first, then the London Gaming Market and Doncaster Videogame Market.

**When did you make the jump to becoming a full-time retro trader?**
It was a big step. I was working as a project manager at OFCOM with great health cover and a pension. But it had got to the point where I was making more money selling games at the shows and online than I did in London. Every department but mine had redundancies, but I resigned anyway, much to the surprise of my bosses and coworkers. It just felt right.

**Were you able to acquire the shop straight away?**
No, I did shows for another six months while keeping an eye out for suitable business premises. One day, I just happened to walk past a parade of shops that was a minute away from where I was living and I noticed this place. It had been a Cash Converters, which is an odd store to have in an affluent place like Leigh-On-Sea, and the owner had spent 20 grand kitting it out with a new counter, alarm, CCTV and so on. Unfortunately, he'd had an accident and could no longer maintain the shop so it became available. It ticked a lot of boxes: not too big, not too small, a bus stop opposite, 15 minutes from the train station and on a main road with parking. I opened in April 2017.

**Was it tough starting out?**
Yes, but luckily I'd built up a good following on social media, especially Twitter, so when I opened the shop I had about 10,000 followers. That was an invaluable advertising tool to let people know the shop existed, and I had a friend at the local paper who did a story.

**Were you worried that your new venture wouldn't take off?**
I think I had a good grasp of where the [games collecting] market was and where it was going. I thought it would work. And in Essex there's a very high volume of gamers and retro gamers because a lot of us grew up close to Southend seafront. We all had similar upbringings, spending days in the arcades, and that led to home consoles and computers. We had [arcade machines] on our doorstep. That pizza and kebab place opposite used to be called Rick's Pizza and it had a Neo Geo Six-Slot. The takeaway down the road had a Nintendo PlayChoice-10. Around here, arcade machines were everywhere.

» Inside The Retro Hunter store, clean, spacious and laden with old-school goodies.

» Pull up a chair, enjoy a beer and play some games at the Neon Knights retro arcade.

» Looks like Raphael has lost at *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* again.

» Ally Hogg has been running The Retro Hunter store since 2017.

» Original PlayStation games are a popular purchase for many customers.

» The Retro Hunter store is situated on London Road, Leigh-On-Sea, Essex.

» Catering to all your retro needs!

» The neon glow and chirpy sounds of an Eighties-style arcade. Bliss.

» It isn't all retro – Ally also stocks 'newer' games.

> "I'm not some random person messaging over the internet and asking if they can come to their house to pick up stuff"
> **ALLY HOGG**

**Do you get people selling you massive collections?**
Quite a few people contact me via social media. They see I have a good reputation and have been around for a while, and the shop helps – I'm not some random person messaging over the internet and asking if they can come to their house to pick up all of their stuff. I'm here, a limited company, and not going anywhere. And every single thing that goes through the store is 100% tested, sometimes painstakingly.

**How has the pandemic affected trade for you?**
The first lockdown was tough – I removed everything from the shop as I didn't know what was going to happen and wasn't prepared for mail order. When we reopened after the other lockdowns, I was better prepared with packing materials and I also offered a click-and-collect service. It affected Neon Knights much worse.

**Let's talk about Neon Knights. It's lovely seeing all those arcade machines on display and still being enjoyed – but it must have been a tricky start…**
Yes, unfortunately it was shut for a year and a half. It started when a guy called David Milne kept coming into the shop and playing on a *Miss Pac-Man* cab I had. We joked it would be nice one day to have an arcade bar-type place and when the shop next door became available, we both invested into creating an arcade. Four machines came from the Happidrome, my childhood arcade on Southend seafront, including my favourite cabinet from my youth, *Track & Field*.

**And you've now acquired a licence so guests can enjoy a beer while gaming! How easy was that to get?**
We went with a third-party business and it saved a lot of hassle. We were busy initially after lockdown but it had quietened down; fortunately now it's better. We do kids' parties, stag parties and have had a 40th birthday party, and to keep things fresh, the machines are changed regularly, as well as swapping the games on the JAMMA cabs.

**[Retro Gamer spots a game it's not heard of, a lightgun machine from Taito.]**
That's *Under Fire* – we believe it's the only working one in an arcade in the UK. We also have a rare Sega Swing cabinet for four-player games such as *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* and *NBA Jam,* as well as a *Donkey Kong* cabaret cabinet and an *Asteroids Deluxe*.

**Do you have any plans for the future that you can reveal?**
Sadly, we missed the third and fourth anniversaries of the shop because of various lockdowns – hopefully for the fifth one I can finally have a big party to say thank you to all the customers who have kept it going. As for Neon Knights, we are going to start some competitions with nice prizes as we begin to build a community of healthy competition. We are small – but friendly!

**To find out more about The Retro Hunter, follow @TheRetroHunter on Twitter and Facebook. Info on Neon Knights can be found at www.neonknights.co.uk**

# BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

**APRIL 2005** – Between the excitement of the new handhelds and the promise of a new bunch of consoles, this is a month to focus on the present, with plenty to play across all of the existing formats – and even the DS. It's time to fire up the flux capacitor…

[Xbox] Sam Fisher pops back out of the shadows, and this time he's brought his friends.

## NEWS APRIL 2005

**On 2 April, Pope John Paul II passed away at the age of 84.** Born as Karol Józef Wojtyla in Wadowice, Poland, he became the first non-Italian head of the Catholic Church in centuries when he was elected on 16 October 1978. The German Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected as his successor on 19 April and took the name Pope Benedict XVI.

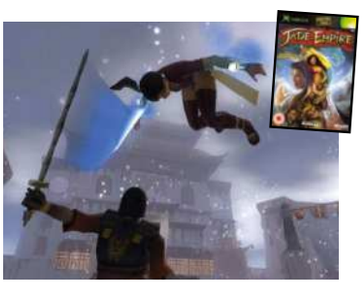
MG Rover, the last remaining British-owned mass-production car manufacturer, entered administration on 8 April with £1.4 billion in debt. Despite an attempted rescue deal with Shanghai Automotive Industry Corporation, the company collapsed with over 6,000 workers made redundant. The company's suppliers also experienced around 25,000 job losses as a consequence. The remaining assets of the company were purchased by Nanjing Automobile Group in July 2005, for £53 million.

On 9 April, Prince Charles married his long-term partner Camilla Parker Bowles, who became the Duchess Of Cornwall. The short 20-minute ceremony had been changed from its intended venue of Windsor Castle to the Windsor Guildhall, and had been postponed by a day to allow invitees to attend the funeral of Pope John Paul II. Unusually, the wedding was a civil ceremony rather than the traditional church wedding, and was not attended by Queen Elizabeth II or Prince Philip.

# THE LATEST NEWS FROM APRIL 2005

**Stealthy Sam Fisher made his highly anticipated return in the multiformat release *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* this month, and he was welcomed back warmly.** Review scores were great across the board, including 9.4/10 from the *Official Xbox Magazine*, 9/10 in the *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*, 9/10 in *XBM*, 89% in *PC Gamer*, 8/10 in *games™* and the same from *Edge*. The new co-operative mode was the star of the show, with *XBM* claiming that the single-player action "isn't a big step in the evolution of the *Splinter Cell* franchise", but that the co-op is "teamwork at its best". Likewise, *games™* felt that, "The ingenious co-op level layouts remind you why we all fell for the series in the first place." Also impressing across platforms was *Brothers In Arms: Road To Hill 30*, the latest in a seemingly endless procession of World War II-themed first-person shooters. It scored 8.9/10 in *Official Xbox Magazine*, which said that, "What it lacks in instant thrills is perfectly counter-balanced by a structured, considered, and in parts touching take on WWII." It also scored 82% in *Play*, 8/10 in *XBM* and 8/10 in *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*, which felt that "relying on the position of your men and the best use of cover produces a completely different dynamic to the likes of *Medal Of Honor* or *Call Of Duty*". *Edge* was a little less positive, complaining that "the sense of available tactics feels limited", but was still impressed enough to give the game 7/10.

For those of us still wanting to fight the console wars, for whatever reason, there were a couple of tasty exclusives doing the rounds. Each of the Xbox magazines got a big scoop, with *Official Xbox Magazine* getting BioWare's martial arts RPG *Jade Empire*. The magazine awarded the game 9.3/10, feeling that it was "an accessible *Star Wars*-beater" that "delivers enough depth and detail to satiate even the most jaded RPG fan". *XBM* got the exclusive review of Microsoft's new racing game, *Forza Motorsport*. The 10/10 review was positive about the realism of the handling, describing it as "a very natural drive and easy to learn", but also demanding of "absolute concentration". Over on the PlayStation 2, *Devil May Cry 3* was drawing the attention of the press, earning 9/10 from *Official PS2*, 8/10 from *games™* and 8/10 from *Edge*. Capcom's latest entry in the




[Xbox] BioWare's latest RPG was only reviewed by the official magazine, but that review was glowing.

[PS2] *Brothers In Arms* takes a more grounded approach to the WWII shooter compared to its contemporaries.

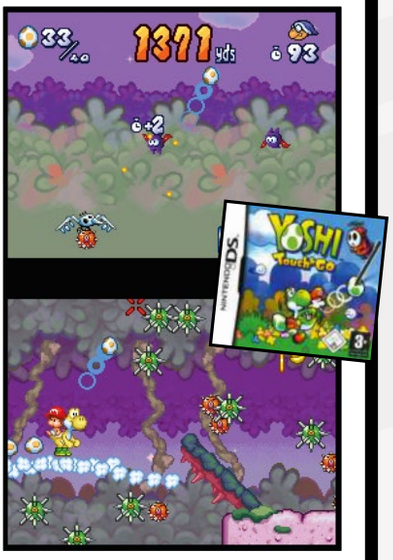
hack-and-slash series was a welcome return to form after the second game, with combat abilities that *games™* felt "make the previously impressive scraps in games like *Prince Of Persia 2* and *Ninja Gaiden* look, well, a bit dull actually". *Edge* described it as "a brashly overconfident music video of a game that thoughtlessly tramples (with 18-hole cherry Doc Martens) where more reserved titles have the sense not to tread".

GameCube owners hoping for the triumphant return of an old favourite would likely have been disappointed by *Star Fox Assault*, a coproduction with Namco. The game earned 73% from *NGC*, and 6.9/10 in *Cube*, and they were the kind ones. *Edge* complained that the flight combat made up a small part of the game, and that the stages were "pale retreads of the dramatic scripting of Nintendo's earlier efforts". The 4/10 review in *games™* highlighted the problem of the ground missions, which "essentially ruin what could have been a very enjoyable game" due to unnatural-feeling movement and repetitive missions. Thankfully, DS owners got a better star turn in the lightweight but enjoyable touchscreen experiment *Yoshi's Touch & Go*, which earned 8/10 in both *games™* and *Edge*. The game, in which you draw clouds on the screen to guide Yoshi, was described by *NGC* as "very nearly the best thing on the DS", but "jarringly small". The magazine scored it 4/5. *Cube* noted that "it does get samey after a while but it's great in small bursts" and concluded that it was "a fine game that utilises the DS's functions incredibly well", awarding it a score of 8.6/10.

For PC gamers, the highlights of the month were of a strategic bent. *Act Of War: Direct Action* scored 80% in the magazine, which felt that although it was essentially "*Command & Conquer* by another name" and "more style than substance", it was "a good, lightweight romp". The main complaint was fixed resource locations, which meant that map design "dictates base locations, and typically your avenues of attack and defence are similarly limited by the placement of roads, impassable objects, buildings and so forth". Naval combat game *Dangerous Waters* was perhaps as deep as the ocean – the review compared the game's manual to chewing gum, saying that, "Chewing gum only takes seven years to digest." It was a game of "hair-silvering complexity", but one that offered "a surprising amount of 'game' here under the simulation" – though it suffered from "mediocre models, dowdy skins, poor pyrotechnics and B- brine". Despite all of the criticisms, it was felt to offer "compelling high-seas hide-and-seek".

That's it for this month – join us again next time for more reviews and an absolute blockbuster of a hardware announcement. You won't want to miss this one. ✱

[GameCube] The return of Fox and friends wasn't one of Namco's finest productions, thanks to its awkward ground missions.




[DS] Yoshi provides a proof of concept for touchscreen gaming, but will future DS games offer more depth?

## CHARTS

### APRIL 2005

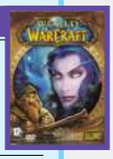
**PLAYSTATION 2**

1 – Sonic Mega Collection Plus (Sega)
2 – Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (Rockstar)
3 – Need For Speed Underground 2 (EA)
4 – UEFA Champions League 2004-2005 (EA)
5 – Shadow Of Rome (Capcom)

**XBOX**

1 – Mercenaries: Playground Of Destruction (LucasArts)
2 – Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic II (Activision)
3 – Sonic Mega Collection Plus (Sega)
4 – Dead Or Alive Ultimate (Microsoft)
5 – Halo 2 (Microsoft)

**PC**



1 – World Of Warcraft (Vivendi)
2 – Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic II (Activision)
3 – The Sims 2 (EA)
4 – Football Manager 2005 (Sega)
5 – The Lord Of The Rings: Battle For Middle-earth (EA)

**MUSIC**

1 – [Is This The Way To] Amarillo (Tony Christie ft Peter Kay)
2 – Somewhere Else (Razorlight)
3 – 1 2 Step (Ciara ft Missy Elliott)
4 – The Wonder Of You (Elvis Presley)
5 – Switch (Will Smith)

## THIS MONTH IN...

### NGC

"It just goes to show that a good mechanical engine of a game is wasted on a game with no creative thought put into level design." What does? *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes* does, according to reader Aaron Robinson. "Well, it isn't for everyone," starts the reply. "It isn't for me either, since I got lost and had to give up halfway through the first one."

### Edge

This month, *Edge* has been to the AOU arcade show in Japan and the presence of smaller developers has made it less gloomy about the future of the market. "If the Japanese arcade market can continue to court popular interest while also providing a haven for independent development, then this will have been, at last, an AOU with a sense of purpose."

### Cube

"Aww, poor old Ninty. It tries to do something nice by giving the Nintendo DS a 'download game' function so several people can play off one cart, but because of this, DS software sales are way down, forcing Nintendo to lower its end of year software sales by 30%." We're not being funny here, but didn't the Game Boy Advance also do single-cart multiplayer, *Cube*?

# BB4CPC

VIN-DI-CA-TION!

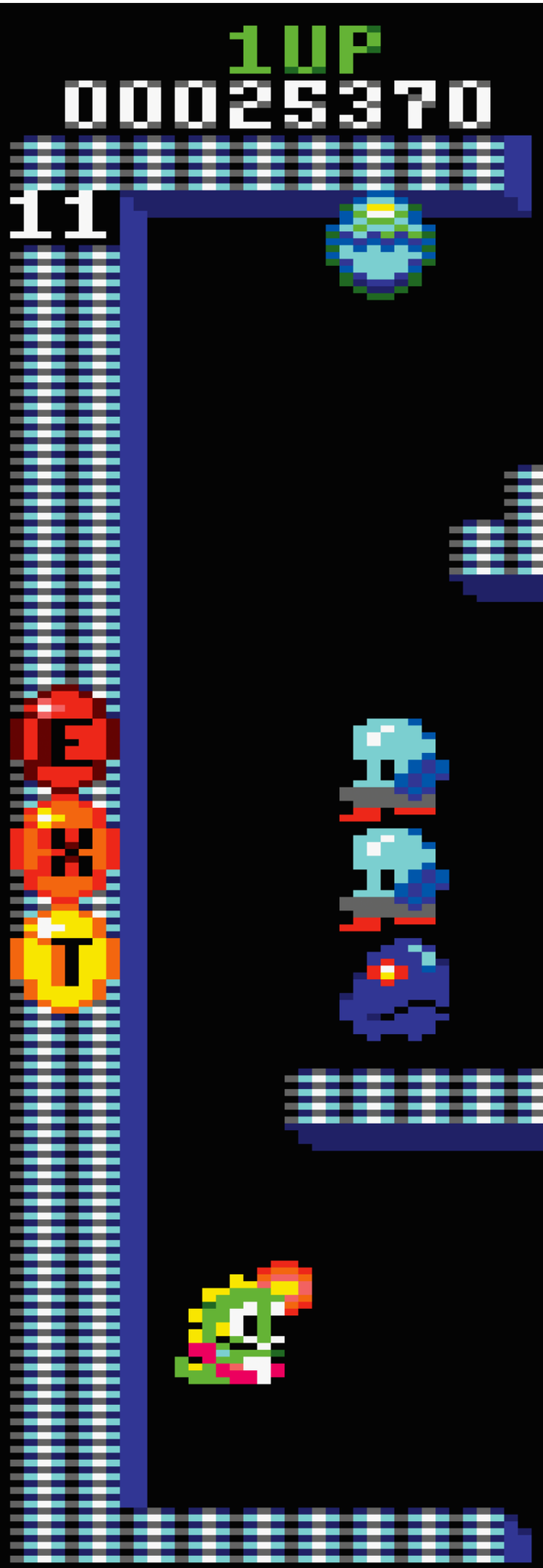
» AMSTRAD CPC » 2011 » CNGSOFT

**It could be tough being a CPC owner growing up.** Most of your mates owned Spectrums and Commodore 64s and when they weren't telling you that their systems were superior to yours, you were very often thinking it yourself.

And how could you not? After all, I loved visiting the arcades and then playing my favourite games on my Amstrad when I got home, but the Amstrad's arcade ports were rarely better than those on the C64 (at least, that's how I bitterly remember it). I recall one particular trip to Luke Palmer's house and I experienced *Bubble Bobble* on his Commodore 64 and it was absolutely magnificent. MAGNIFICENT! The graphics and audio were obviously nowhere near as good as the original arcade machine but compared to the rather naff version I had at home it felt like a revelation. I mean, the Amstrad version didn't even have music and here's the C64 version effortlessly playing a brilliant rendition of the bouncy arcade tune – it's enough to make you sick.

Time is a great healer however and it's clearly obvious that the coders at CNGSoft felt my misery, as they created their own version of *Bubble Bobble* in 2011 and to me it feels every bit as good as that incredible C64 conversion I played all those years ago at Luke's house. The sound is superb, the graphics have been redrawn and look far punchier and it runs at a slightly nippier pace too. Even the collision detection has been improved, meaning it simply feels far more authentic than the official version published back in 1987.

If I could have told Luke Palmer back then that in 35 years time people would not only be playing on Amstrads still, but would be making games that could be far better than the ones we were currently enjoying he simply wouldn't have believed me. Hell, I wouldn't have believed me either. Yet here we are, all those years later and 8-bit systems like the Amstrad are still very much alive and kicking thanks to a constant stream of great homebrew content. Let's hope it never ends. ✱



HIGH SCORE
00126310
2UP
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# SUPER-POWERED

## 30 GAMES THAT PUSHED THE LIMITS OF THE SNES

***WORDS BY NICK THORPE AND DARRAN JONES***

**THE SNES IS UNDENIABLY A SUPERB CONSOLE, AND WITH HUNDREDS OF GAMES AVAILABLE THERE ARE PLENTY OF CLASSICS TO CHOOSE FROM. BUT WHICH GAMES REALLY MADE THE MOST OF THE HARDWARE AVAILABLE, AND HOW DID THEY DO IT? WE TAKE A LOOK AND FIND OUT**

**They say that all good things are worth waiting for, and Nintendo fans of the early Nineties knew that all too well – after all, *Super Mario Bros 3* was nearly three years old by the time it arrived on our shores.** The SNES is undeniably a good thing, being the console that **Retro Gamer** readers voted as the greatest games system of all time back in 2018, and a long wait was inevitable – nearly a year and a half passed between the Japanese launch of the Super Famicom and the UK arrival of the SNES. That means that this year marks our 30th anniversary with the console.

To celebrate this anniversary, we're taking a look back at 30 games that really tested the SNES hardware on a technical level, and we've asked a variety of industry professionals what impressed them too. The popularity of the console meant that it was home to over 1,700 games, and the system's long life meant that developers had plenty of time to really explore the hardware and get the very best out of it. Over the years, Nintendo's machine had the chance to excel in just about every genre possible, and the variety of the games we've chosen here is testament to the breadth of its library.

To be clear, this list is also in no particular order, as all of the games deserve recognition without silly things like rankings getting in the way. We're also judging these games solely on their achievements with the SNES hardware – though there are certainly plenty of classics to be found in the list, these might not be the best games for the system, nor better than versions available for other platforms. However, all of them make impressive use of Nintendo's 16-bit hardware in some way, be it a graphical achievement, amazing audio or a feat of clever programming. So without further ado, let's take a look at the first game on the list.

## STAR FOX

**NINTENDO EAD/ARGONAUT • 1993**

One of the interesting things about the SNES is that so many of the console's games didn't just reach the theoretical limits of the machine, but used additional technology in order to exceed them. The first cartridge with an added chip shipped when the SNES was just weeks old, but for the most part these weren't something that anyone made a big deal of – their effect wasn't seen to be transformative.

With the development of the Super FX chip, all of that changed. Argonaut's supplemental processor allowed for fast 3D polygonal graphics to be displayed on the SNES, and quickly became a marketing point on the games that used it. *Star Fox* was the first of them, and the rail shooter was enormously impressive – just about every foreground object was made of polygons, from giant walking robots to deadly tunnels, and of course the massive floating head of big baddie Andross.

Action games with filled polygons were still a relative rarity in arcades when *Star Fox* was released, with Namco's *Starblade* having only launched a year and a half prior. To have such a game running at home, on a console that wasn't even designed to handle it, felt like the future.

## PILOTWINGS

**NINTENDO EAD • 1990**

As great as *F-Zero* was, it could be argued that *Pilotwings* provided a better earlier showcase of the marquee feature of the SNES, Mode 7. There's no two ways about it, flight disciplines like sky diving just give more natural opportunities to take advantage of a 3D plane than racing does. Interestingly, despite being built alongside the hardware *Pilotwings* became the first SNES game to use an enhancement chip, with the DSP-1 chip providing crucial mathematical support for the game's 3D calculations. The greater accuracy of a later bug-fixed version of the chip had an unintended consequence, causing the biplane to crash in attract mode.

### MY SNES TECH PICK

"Super Mario Kart obviously impressed me with its terrific use of Mode 7. I still think it was as close to the perfect game you could get on the SNES. The Mode 7 screen seemed perfectly designed for short track racing like in Mario."

**NICK JONES**

**Programmer, Alien 3, Earthworm Jim**

## ACTRAISER

**QUINTET • 1990**

One of the very earliest SNES games, *ActRaiser* combined city building and platform hack-and-slash action into a hugely compelling game, but it stands out for the brilliance of its audio in particular. If there was one man that could be relied upon to get the best from any sound chip in the late-Eighties and early Nineties, it was Yuzo Koshiro. He had already turned in iconic work on the PC-88 for Falcom's *Ys*, and did wonders with *The Revenge Of Shinobi* on the Mega Drive. *ActRaiser* was like nothing he'd ever done before, though. Using the S-SMP sound system's ability to play back digital samples, he created an orchestral sound that demonstrated just how capable the SNES was on the audio front. Go and listen to *Fillmore* or *Aitos* – those are top tier tunes on any system, we'd say.

## STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 2

**CAPCOM • 1996**

It's fair to say that many people bought a SNES to play *Street Fighter II*, and the three versions of it sold 12.4 million copies. That goes a large way towards explaining Capcom's ambitious decision to create a conversion of *Street Fighter Alpha 2* for the ageing 16-bit machine, despite it being far better suited to the 32-bit consoles on which it was also released.

Naturally, this conversion involved some compromises. Some backgrounds were cut, audio quality took a hit and there was some evidence of slowdown, but it contained all the characters and moves of its arcade counterpart. Fitting all of that in required a comparatively large 32 megabit ROM, and even then the graphics data needed to be compressed by 50%, with the S-DD1 enhancement chip used to decompress it.

This version of *Street Fighter Alpha 2* isn't the one most gamers would choose to play today, but that doesn't mean that we should overlook what an achievement it was. There were plenty of people that had yet to upgrade to new machines back in 1996, and the effort the developers made to ensure that a respectable version of the game was available for those players is commendable.

### MY SNES TECH PICK

"For me I'm going to choose Nintendo's late release, Yoshi's Island. It has a distinctive, unique style that doesn't ape its contemporaries and as a result it still manages to look fresh and vibrant today."

**BILL HARBISON**
**Artist, Batman, Jurassic Park**

## TALES OF PHANTASIA

**WOLF TEAM • 1995**

Epic is a word that is overused when describing Japanese RPGs, but this entry in Namco's long-running series justifies it. Launching on a whopping 48 megabit cartridge, the game had plenty of space for unique areas, voice clips and more – you could easily spend dozens of hours on it and still fail to see everything it has to offer. The most impressive feat comes when you first start the game, though. The intro music is actually a full vocal song, which sounds like something straight out of an anime series and runs for almost two and a half minutes.

## SOS

**HUMAN ENTERTAINMENT • 1993**

You might not feel that this platform adventure in a sinking ship looks all too special, although it does use Mode 7 extensively to show the vessel capsizing. The real trick here is the use of Mode 0. This offers four scrolling background layers, but carries a severe limitation that made it one of the console's more rarely used graphical modes – each tile is limited to a palette of four colours. Human Entertainment worked around this to create a cavernous boiler room, using the multiple layers to convey the illusion of depth very effectively in the game's final area.

## LEMMINGS 2: THE TRIBES

**DMA DESIGN • 1994**

When you think of games that would tax a console, the *Lemmings* series might not be the first one that springs to mind. However, it is more challenging than you might think. One of the primary issues is that the SNES can struggle when pushing plenty of sprites, and can suffer from dropouts when too many sprites are displayed on the same line. The potential for graphical dropouts was solved by drawing the lemmings on a background layer instead of the sprite layer, with clever programming ensuring that the speed kept up.

While most SNES games would reuse tiles in VRAM, *Lemmings 2* put unique tiles in for each part of the scenery, even if the graphics were identical. This meant that as one piece of scenery was destroyed, the corresponding tile could be replaced with its new state without affecting the rest of the scene.

## STREET RACER

**VIVID IMAGE • 1994**

While *Super Mario Kart* was never truly knocked off its pedestal on the SNES, *Street Racer* gave it a damn good go with some nice alternative game modes, and it actually pulled off some astonishing technical feats. Firstly, there's the use of a DSP chip – or a lack thereof. Nintendo had frequently employed this for its own Mode 7 games, including *Super Mario Kart*. Vivid Image managed to do without this for its own racer.

You might think this would have limited the game's performance, but this was not the case. In fact, the development team managed to one-up the plumber by extending the split-screen action to four players. This used four squat rows because it was impossible to draw a two by two window layout while using Mode 7, but the result was still impressive.

## SEIKEN DENSETSU 3

**SQUARE • 1995**

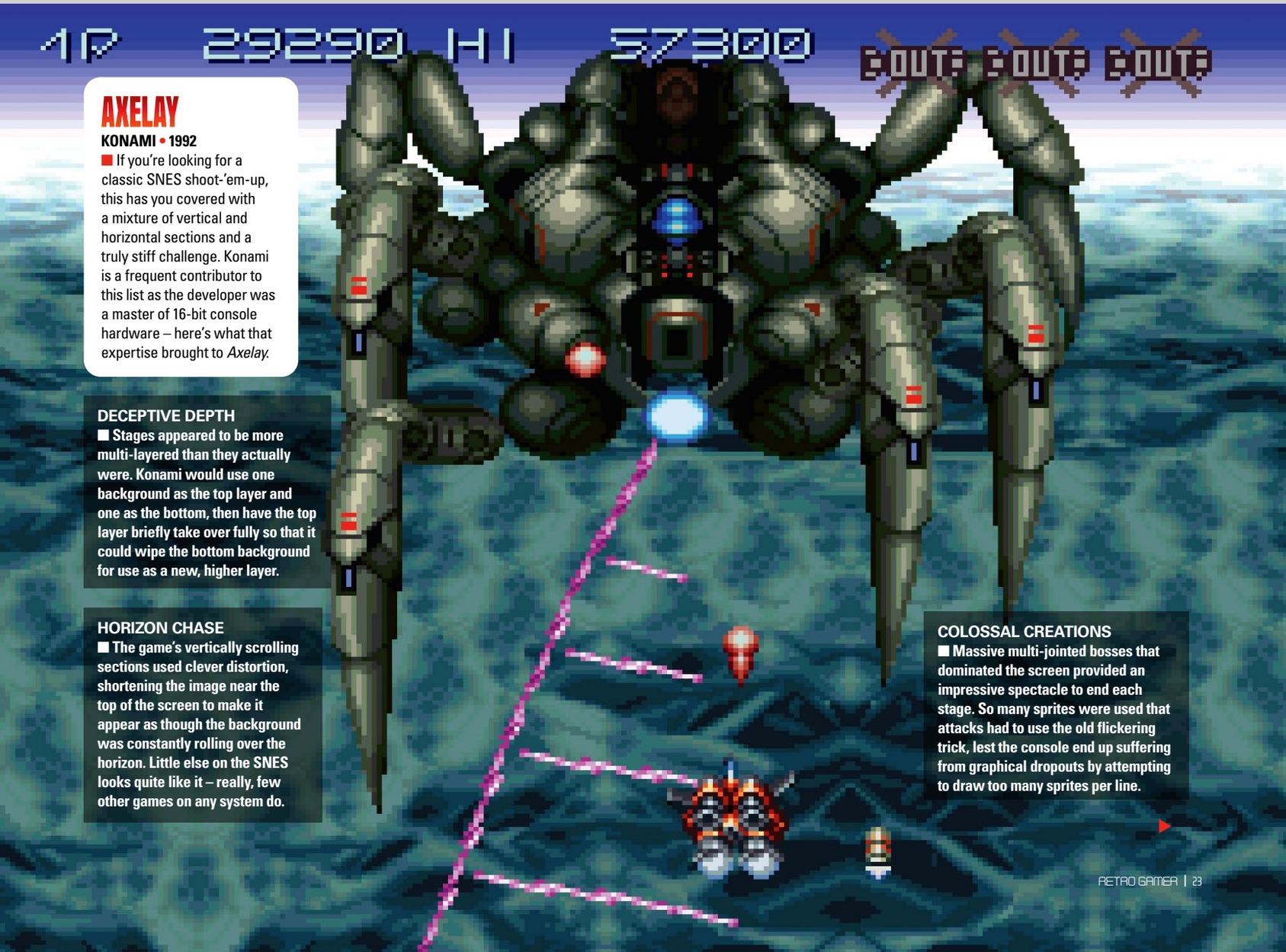
The sequel to *Secret Of Mana* remained a Japanese exclusive release until a translated version named *Trials Of Mana* arrived as part of the *Collection Of Mana* compilation in 2019. We're glad it finally got an official translation, as it had been an injustice that the game hadn't been accessible to more players – this action-based RPG is a true SNES classic.

Sometimes, it's hard to believe what you can do while working within a system's limitations. Apart from delivering a stellar soundtrack, which was a staple of Square games by this point in time, the game is one of the most beautiful of its era. The limitation of 16 colours per palette seems like absolutely nothing against the talent of the team's pixel artists, and the game would have looked perfectly at home amongst the 2D offerings of any of the next generation of consoles.

### MY SNES TECH PICK

"One game stood out for me: Axelay. Konami conjured everything the SNES was capable of (and not sure if seriously capable of) all at once. Mode 7 insanity from the clouds and swooping alien craft in stage 1, through the stomping 'ED-209' boss and heat-hazy lava pools. It had a novel shooting mechanic and the game design was tight with unique challenges to contend with. Absolutely nothing was lazy or standard about Axelay. Hard to believe this was the console that strained to save Super R-Type from being a stop-motion shooter."

**PAUL DAVIES**
**Editor, Nintendo Magazine System**




## AXELAY

**KONAMI • 1992**

If you're looking for a classic SNES shoot-'em-up, this has you covered with a mixture of vertical and horizontal sections and a truly stiff challenge. Konami is a frequent contributor to this list as the developer was a master of 16-bit console hardware – here's what that expertise brought to *Axelay*.

**DECEPTIVE DEPTH**

**Stages appeared to be more multi-layered than they actually were. Konami would use one background as the top layer and one as the bottom, then have the top layer briefly take over fully so that it could wipe the bottom background for use as a new, higher layer.**

**HORIZON CHASE**

**The game's vertically scrolling sections used clever distortion, shortening the image near the top of the screen to make it appear as though the background was constantly rolling over the horizon. Little else on the SNES looks quite like it – really, few other games on any system do.**

**COLOSSAL CREATIONS**

**Massive multi-jointed bosses that dominated the screen provided an impressive spectacle to end each stage. So many sprites were used that attacks had to use the old flickering trick, lest the console end up suffering from graphical dropouts by attempting to draw too many sprites per line.**

### MY SNES TECH PICK

"For me, it was Street Fighter II because Capcom had to squeeze all that content down from an arcade machine into a Super NES, but the end result was it played the same! (Indeed I was just as bad at playing it on SNES as I was the arcade machine.) Of course, I might have subconsciously only chosen that game because I paid over £90 to get a Japanese import of that cartridge at the time of release."

**CHRIS SUTHERLAND**
**Head programmer, Donkey Kong Country**

## RPM RACING

**SILICON & SYNAPSE • 1991**

Most players will be more familiar with Silicon & Synapse as Blizzard, and likewise we'd wager that *Rock N' Roll Racing* will resonate with more of you than this isometric racing precursor. But *RPM Racing* did something that most SNES games, including its successor, didn't. While the vast majority of SNES games had a 256x224 screen resolution, RPM Racing used the console's high-resolution 512x448 interlaced mode which looked exceptionally sharp compared to the competition, and even managed to include split-screen multiplayer. Interestingly, the Japanese version of the game uses a lower resolution and adds more trackside scenery.

## KIRBY'S DREAM LAND 3

**HAL LABORATORY • 1997**

*Kirby* games are not typically ones that you'd think of as being particularly technically taxing, but this one does some interesting things befitting of being the console's final North American release. For a start, the cartridge makes use of the SA-1 enhancement chip – a version of the 65C816 CPU that is faster and has more features than the standard one used in the SNES console.

Really though, this one just looks very pretty. In part that's because of the art style, which has a hand-sketched style that is reminiscent of that used in *Yoshi's Island*, while retaining its own distinct character. It's also down to the use of the console's pseudo high-resolution mode, which is used to blend adjacent pixels to create some excellent transparency effects when Kirby dips into the water or goes behind trees in the forest.

## DOOM

**SCULPTURED SOFTWARE • 1995**

Back in the mid-Nineties, id Software's ultra violent first-person shooter was one of the very hottest PC games on the market. While it's a game that runs on ATMs and printers today, people used to measure consoles against one another based on how well they replicated the original version, because PCs were still not affordable for many. What nobody expected was that the SNES would be part of that conversation, but it was thanks to the efforts of programmer Randy Linden and the Super FX 2 chip.

Once again it's important to remember the context it was released in. This was by far the cheapest way to play the game on a console – your contemporary alternatives were to pick up a 32X, a Jaguar or a PlayStation. The SNES version actually holds its own pretty well against the Jaguar and 32X, too – it has background music that was missing from the Jaguar version, the SNES levels are typically closer to the PC originals, and it even managed to incorporate the Cyberdemon and Spider Mastermind that were missing from those versions. The enemy sprites can only face forward and the floors and ceilings aren't textured, but this was a heck of an achievement regardless.

## STAR FOX 2

**NINTENDO EAD/ ARGONAUT • 2017**

Does this count as cheating? No, it's our list and we make the rules. The sequel to the original Super FX hit was cancelled by Nintendo in mid-1995, but eventually saw release as a bonus game on the SNES Classic Mini in 2017. Here's why it was still impressive 22 years later.

**EXTRA FX**

*Star Fox 2* would have included a Super FX 2 chip in its cartridge had it been released. Arguably the most powerful of the SNES enhancement chips, this 21MHz chip was the design Argonaut had originally favoured, but Nintendo went with the slower Super FX for cost reasons.

**FREEDOM TO ROAM**

While the original game had on-rails gameplay, that wasn't actually the original plan. The use of the Super FX 2 allowed the game's designers to realise their intended vision of open 3D battlefields, which could be freely traversed with the new bipedal robot mode of the Arwing fighters.

**TASTEFUL TEXTURES**

As well as providing improved polygon drawing performance, the additional power of the Super FX 2 allowed for texture mapping. Though limited in use, it did help to provide an additional level of graphical detail in a game that had to adopt a relatively sparse appearance out of necessity.

## SUPER TURRICAN 2

**FACTOR 5 • 1995**

The second SNES entry in the renowned run-and-gun series pulls out just about every graphical trick the console has to offer. If you're not being dazzled by the colourful transparent laser attacks, you might be taken aback by the use of line and column scrolling to create heat haze in the background and undulating creatures in the foreground. If multi-sprite boss creatures don't take your fancy, how about the Mode 7 one with a tongue that rotates independently of its head? You've probably seen most of these effects elsewhere once before, but few SNES games are as densely packed with graphical trickery as this one.

### MY SNES TECH PICK

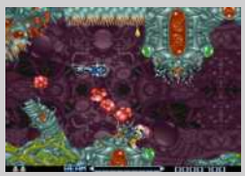
"When the SNES was released in 1991 in North America, I got the first games available, as did everyone else. To me, the most impressive game was F-Zero with its Mode 7 scrolling landscape that looked 3D. The speed of the scrolling was really impressive and the game perfectly showcased the power of the SNES, and gave the Sega Genesis a big smackdown."

**JOHN ROMERO**

**Designer, Wolfenstein 3D, Doom, Quake**

## R-TYPE III: THE THIRD LIGHTNING

**TAMTEX • 1993**



Irem's famed shoot-'em-up series has never been one for revolutionary changes, instead delivering consistently high-quality action whenever it appears. However, *Super R-Type* was a bit of a blot on the record – while the game design was not at all bad, the game suffered from frequent slowdown that genuinely disrupted the experience. When people criticise the slow speed of the SNES CPU, *Super R-Type* is frequently used as evidence.

*R-Type III* is a great game that dismissed any bad memories of its predecessor. The game was designed from the ground up for the SNES, allowing the coders to optimise the action for the hardware – and to their credit, the Bydo assault doesn't feel even slightly diminished. What's more, Mode 7 was used to great effect to provide level designs that had been previously impossible in the *R-Type* series.

# RENDERING RANGER: R2

**RAINBOW ARTS • 1995**

This Japanese exclusive is a bit of a rarity, as it was actually developed in Europe with *Turrican* mastermind Manfrend Trenz at the helm. The game itself is just as rare as the circumstances of its release, and carries a hefty price. Here's why it's so highly sought after.

**ENORMOUS ENEMIES**

Not only does *Rendering Ranger* throw around a lot of sprites in a way that seems like it should be beyond the SNES, it also manages to shift some pretty big ones too. Even the regular enemies can be pretty chunky, but the bosses are frequently screen-filling behemoths.

**PEAK PERFORMANCE**

What really makes the whole thing work is that it is all pulled off smoothly. The slow CPU of the SNES can be a weakness in fast action games, with shoot-'em-ups of all kinds being particularly susceptible to slowdown. The efficient programming here banishes that in a very pleasing manner.

**RENDERED BY NAME**

The game's name comes from its use of pre-rendered graphics, which was a late stylistic choice inspired by the success of *Donkey Kong Country*. While there's an element of trend chasing to that particular decision, it doesn't diminish the good looks of the game when taken on its own terms.

## MY SNES TECH PICK

"Donkey Kong Country. The one and only time in a 40-year career that I wrote a fan letter to a company. For me, it was the perfect SNES game – it looked absolutely beautiful (and undoubtedly spurred the industry on into buying SGI computers with Power Animator!), the soundtrack was phenomenal, and the difficulty curve was absolutely spot on. It was charming, it was infuriating, it was addictive. As a data compression nut I was thinking, 'How the hell did they cram all these sprites in there?' (The answer, as it turns out, was an enormous 32 megabit ROM!) Outside of Super Mario World it is one of the finest platformers ever to grace the platform."

**PAUL HUGHES**
**Coder, Operation Thunderbolt**

## DRAKKHEN

**KEMCO • 1991**

This RPG is a port from home computers, and it's just as impressive here as it is on those platforms for one particular reason. Rather than using standard 2D graphics or utilising the Mode 7 capability of the SNES, overworld exploration in *Drakkhen* takes place on a vector-based 3D map, populated by 2D sprites with different sizes that simulate scaling. KEMCO was able to keep the action running smoothly during these scenes too, by limiting the field of view. It's all very impressive given that the overworld sections were drawn entirely in software, with no enhancement chips in the cartridge.

## F-ZERO

**NINTENDO EAD • 1990**

You might look at this entry and ask yourself if Nintendo was really pushing the limits of its console from the very moment it launched. The truth is, it absolutely was – but not for the reasons that you might think. The Mode 7 tracks of this futuristic racer were astonishing in 1990, but the system was designed specifically to draw them. The high speed of the game remains impressive even today, but it's not the actual speed that interests us either. Rather, it's a design factor that enabled that speed – *F-Zero* could be so fast because its tracks were enormous. When Nintendo tried to create a two-player version of the game, the use of a split-screen limited the map size, forcing it to create a slower racing game with a different theme. That game became *Super Mario Kart* – not bad.

## STAR OCEAN

**TRI-ACE • 1996**

This is the big one. Not only does this whopping RPG come on a 48 megabit cartridge, but that cartridge includes the S-DD1 decompression chip. In terms of the amount of data it packs, *Star Ocean* tops every other official SNES release – in fact, a user modification to run the game without the S-DD1 results in a 96 megabit game, which is the kind of figure more commonly seen on the boxes of Neo Geo games. You might not be surprised to learn that tri-Ace was formed of former members of Wolf Team, developers of the titanic *Tales Of Phantasia*.

## SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV

**KONAMI • 1991**

You'd think Dracula would have had enough of getting his undead backside handed to him by the Belmont clan, but apparently you can't keep a good vampire down, so the horror platformer series made its return on the SNES. The most immediately striking upgrade over the NES games was its soundtrack, which used the SPC-700 sound hardware to create some magnificently atmospheric tracks using sampled instruments. However, it was the clever use of Mode 7 to enhance level design that set it apart from many early SNES games. Using your weapon to hang on a hook as the stage rotated around you was magnificent, and the cylindrical rolling tunnel looked like nothing else on any console – the trick is that the level of zoom applied to the background is adjusted after each scanline, zooming out and then back in.

### MY SNES TECH PICK

" Like anyone else who was a kid in the early Nineties, I was obsessed with Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. I had played a TON of the NES games, as that was my primary console until late into 1993. My brother picked up a SNES that year and one of the first games we played on it was Turtles In Time. Our minds were blown from the minute we managed to throw a foot soldier into the screen. To jump from the flickering sprites on the NES to the smooth and dynamic action of the SNES game – that was incredible for us. "

**JOSH FAIRHURST**
**Founder, Limited Run Games**

## GANBARE GOEMON 3: SHISHIJŪROKUBĒ NO KARAKURI MANJI GATAME

**KONAMI • 1994**

What's astonishing about Konami's output on the SNES is the way in which it kept finding new applications for the console's capabilities. That is exemplified well in its third 16-bit entry in the *Goemon* series – better known as *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* on these shores. The game includes first-person mech fights, which is just as exciting an addition as it sounds. These battles feel nice and dynamic because your opponent zooms in and out using Mode 7, getting right in your face at certain points. What's quite cool here is the rudimentary background created by modifying the basic screen colour at multiple points during the frame. Mode 7 bosses in other games frequently took place against solid colour backgrounds, so this was a good way to get around the more severe limitations of the mode.

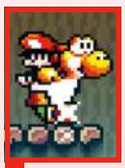
## SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND

**NINTENDO EAD • 1995**

The Super FX chips were renowned for their ability to produce polygonal 3D graphics, but their potential to transform 2D games was much less explored. Fortunately, this classic platformer went a good way towards showing exactly what could be done, and did it with the Super FX 2 to boot. Of course, that's not to say that some polygons weren't chucked in – hazards that fall from the background to squash Yoshi are evidence enough of that.

What made Yoshi's Island so impressive was how it seemed to unshackle the SNES. Mode 7 allowed you to rotate and scale one background layer – the Super FX 2 could rotate multiple sprites on the same screen. Sprites could be warped and distorted with ease and transparency effects were in evidence all over the shop. The disparity between the lo-fi crayon aesthetic and the high-tech tricks on offer was certainly a large one.

Remarkably, none of the special effects feel like they're just there for Nintendo to show off, with every technical trick employed to enhance the game design in some way. For that kind of approach to game design, we'll happily put up with a screaming infant plumber all day long.



### MY SNES TECH PICK

" Difficult question. Maybe Yoshi's Island on SNES, because it makes the SNES almost look like a new console. Though there are many games that were impressive at the time when they were released. "

**JENS RESTEMEIER**
**Programmer, Yooka-Laylee**

## CYBERNATOR

**NCS CORP • 1992**

Few SNES blasters are as outrageous as this boisterous gem. Not only is *Cybernator* brilliantly animated and full of intense action, it also offers a spectacular sense of scale with your mech towering over the tiny humans that occasionally fight against you. Many of the on-screen sprites are huge in size, while explosions are thrown about recklessly but never hamper the on-screen action. It's a dynamic tour de force of the SNES' hardware capabilities and proves just what was capable by talented developers (witness the superb asteroids level if you need further proof of NCS Corp's game pushing technical boundaries).

## SD F1 GRAND PRIX

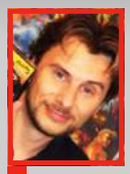
**VIDEO SYSTEM • 1995**

The success of *Super Mario Kart* led to a slew of copycat clones, including this delightful effort. While it's not quite as polished as Nintendo's racer, it's no technical slouch with the same amount of racers on-screen and equally colourful environments (although many of the courses are inspired by actual Formula 1 tracks). It all moves at a tremendous rate too. The real reason that Video System's game makes our list though is because of something that many might consider to be rather throwaway – namely the sheer amount of speech that spills from the lips of the game's twin commentators (who we're assuming are caricatures of real-life commentators of the sport). Granted it's at the expense of in-game music and is all in Japanese, but it remains highly impressive to hear them commenting away as you jostle for first place.

## RYUUKO NO KEN 2

**MONOLITH • 1994**

The SNES is no stranger to impressive arcade ports, nor was it short on fighting games. As a result Nintendo's console boasts quite a few ports of games from SNK's Neo Geo arcade board, but only this ambitious effort from Monolith makes our cut. Confined to Japan, it's not only an excellent port of a highly underrated beat-'em-up, but also impresses on a technical level thanks to its slick animation and relatively large sprites. The reason it makes our list is because it's the only contemporary conversion to emulate the arcade game's impressive zooming in and out, meaning fights feel even more dynamic.



### MY SNES TECH PICK

" For me Donkey Kong Country was by far the most technically impressive game on the SNES. Not just because it was the first pre-rendered game on the system, but also because it was packed full of gameplay variety. In addition to the 3D rendered sprites and backgrounds, the music really pushed the SNES creating an unforgettable soundtrack which suited the game perfectly. It was packed full of beautiful parallax weather effects and plenty of other visual treats throughout. This 'ultra combo' of elements makes it a benchmark SNES game to this day in my opinion. But then again, I would say that wouldn't I? I remember when it was unveiled to the public, journalists were asking us if we'd been modifying the hardware to get it to look the way it did. I call that technically impressive! "

**KEVIN BAYLISS**

**Artist, Donkey Kong Country**

## DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

**RARE • 1994**

Rare's incredible technical capabilities are so accomplished that when *Donkey Kong Country* was first shown off, many mistakenly assumed it was running on Nintendo's incoming 64-bit console. Created with the aim to combat Shiny Entertainment's *Aladdin* on Mega Drive, Nintendo didn't have access to Disney animators, but it did have Rare and the eager beavers at Twycross had been experimenting with a proprietary graphics system that eventually became ACM (Advanced Computer Modelling). By using powerful SGI workstations that had cost thousands of pounds, the small team of 12 (which occasionally hit 20) were able to create the advanced pre-rendered graphics that gives *Donkey Kong Country* its distinctive, stylised look. Equally memorable is the game's gorgeous soundtrack, which was overseen by David Wise, who used advanced Waveform sequences in order to get the desired sound out of the 64 kilobits of cartridge capacity he'd been assigned. The end result is one of the system's most spectacular-looking games and an early technical indicator of what Rare would achieve on the N64. Indeed, perhaps the biggest accomplishment you could say about Rare's game is that despite its many technical tricks and feats the developers were able to cram the entire game on a 32 megabit cart without the need for additional add-on components.

## SUPER ALESTE

**COMPILE • 1992**

Shmups don't have a great reputation on Nintendo's 16-bit console, but efforts like Compile's *Super Aleste* proved that the SNES was more than capable of taking on its peers. Here's why.

**CRAZY EFFECTS**
Compile's game has all manner of clever graphical effects throughout its 12 stages, from translucent clouds and multiple levels of parallax, to a cool background trick that makes certain stages shimmer and wobble.

**MODE 7**
*Super Aleste* is packed with liberal use of Mode 7, with the highlight being level two's gigantic space station. It's initially tiny on-screen before scaling in to be several screens in size.

**SPRITE OVERLOAD**
The SNES is supposed to be quite poor at chucking sprites about, but nobody told this to Compile, as it flings sprites about the screen with a gleeful lack of disregard of the console's apparent capabilities.

**LACK OF SLOWDOWN**
Considering the amount of action in this screenshot you're probably thinking Compile's game often slows to a crawl like *Super R-Type*. You'll be pleasantly surprised to learn that slowdown rarely appears and never hampers play.

## CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS

**KONAMI • 1992**

Konami rarely put a foot wrong on the SNES, delivering top-quality games that were technically polished and fantastic fun to play. Occasional moments of slowdown rarely ruin the flow of *Contra III*, which plays out at a blistering pace. Mode 7 effects abound throughout Konami's game, but the best examples are undoubtedly the two overhead stages that play out on huge maps that you rotate with the L and R buttons. Just look at this example – the boss rotates in one direction, while the ground uses sprites to simulate a second independently rotating layer, creating one of the game's most spectacular moments in the process.

### MY SNES TECH PICK

"I remember stopping dead in my tracks on seeing Axelay the first time. It just seemed to be doing the impossible! The smooth 3D effect as you blasted up the screen, huge bosses and just layers upon layers of transparency. Then you got to the second stage with the fight against the 'ED-209' boss and when you thought that couldn't be topped it did, stage after stage after stage, the fire stage being essentially a 3D version of Gradius II. The guys went on to form Treasure and of course astounded us further with each game, but Axelay still has a place close to my heart."

**STEVE LYCETT**
**Producer, OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast**

## INDIANA JONES' GREATEST ADVENTURES

**FACTOR 5/LUCASARTS • 1994**

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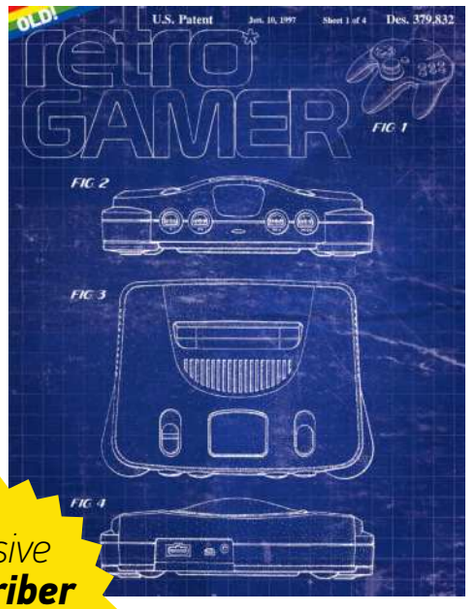


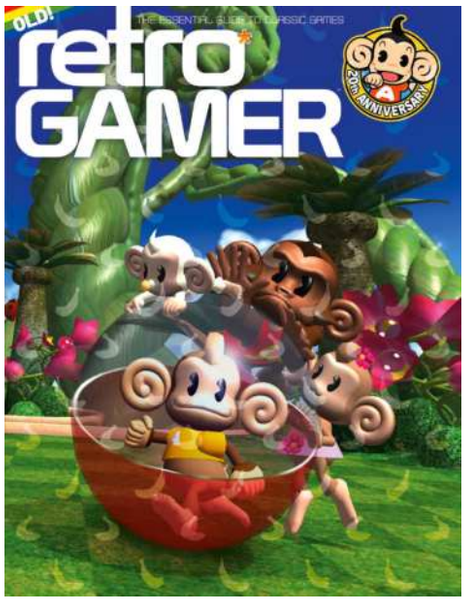


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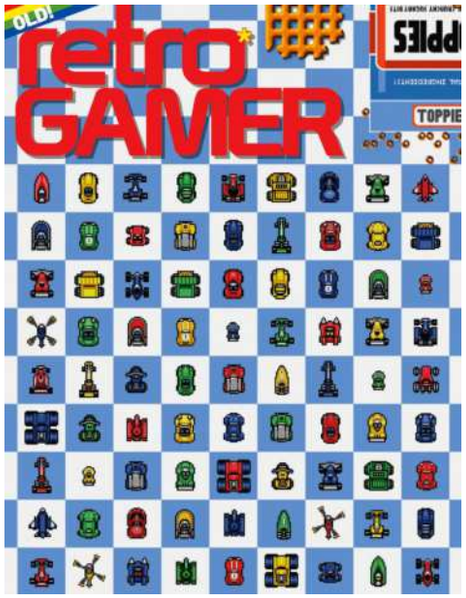


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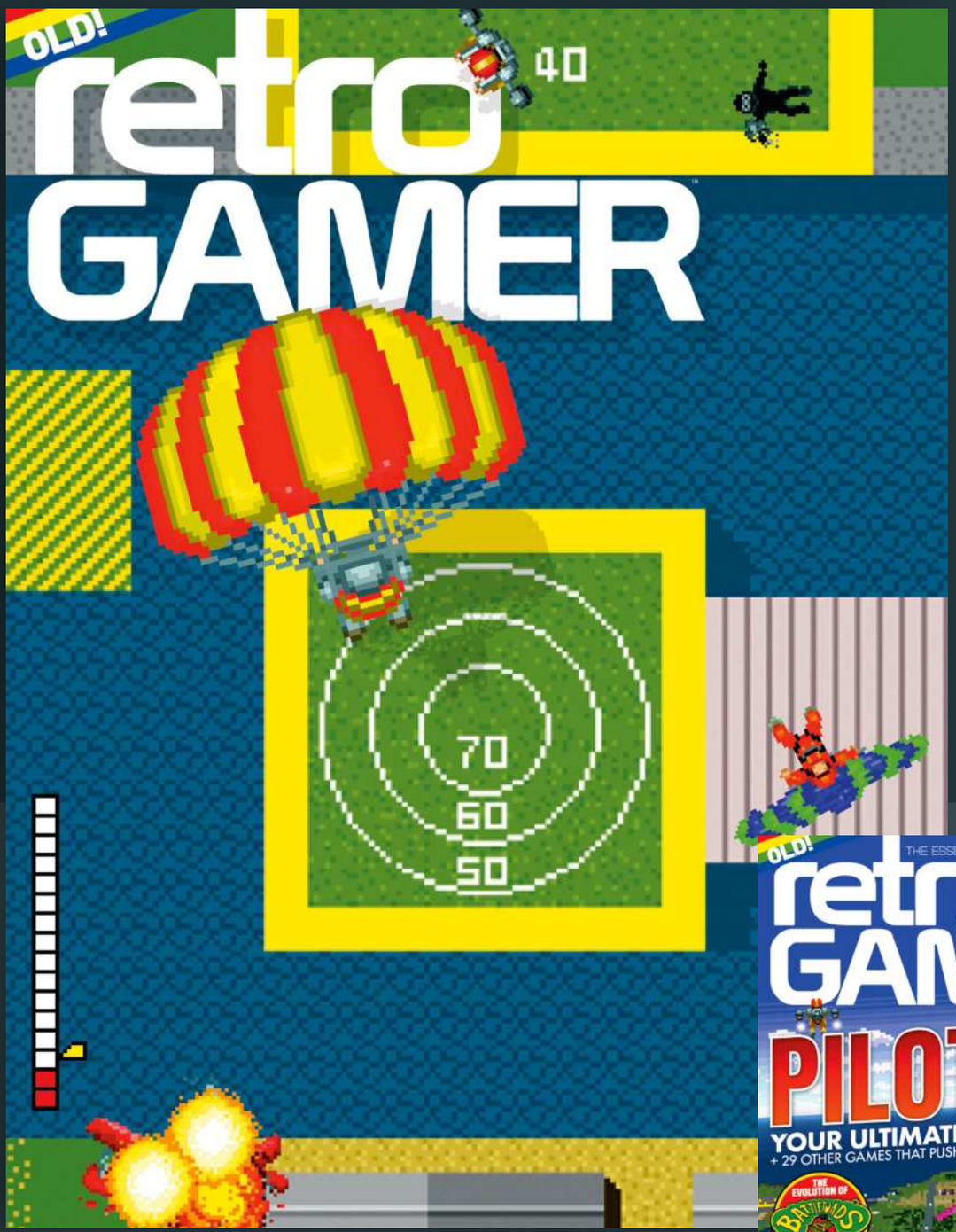


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ULTIMATE GUIDE

# Pilotwings

THE ORIGINAL PILOTWINGS IS AN ANACHRONISM; IT REPRESENTS PEAK EIGHTIES TECH, YET IT HELPED DEFINE THE VIDEOGAME ERA OF THE NINETIES. WHAT WE ULTIMATELY RECEIVED IS ALSO VERY DIFFERENT TO THE GAME ORIGINALLY ENVISIONED. NINTENDO HAS SEEMINGLY FORGOTTEN THE SERIES, BUT WE CERTAINLY HAVEN'T!

**Words by John Szczepaniak**

» Using old magazine scans and leaked graphics assets, Chris Covell created this accurate mock-up of the unreleased *Dragonfly*.

**The history of *Pilotwings* is inextricably entwined with the conception of the Super Famicom itself, and to fully appreciate it, one needs to visualise the global zeitgeist of November 1988.** This was the same month the films *They Live* and *Scrooged* both premiered; *Last Ninja 2* topped UK software charts, while *Super Mario Bros 2* on NES enthralled the US. In Japan though, on the 21st of that month, Nintendo was demonstrating the Super Famicom for the first time. This new hardware had been hinted at as early as September 1987, but this was its grand unveiling. *Famitsu* magazine naturally ran a feature in its 64th issue.

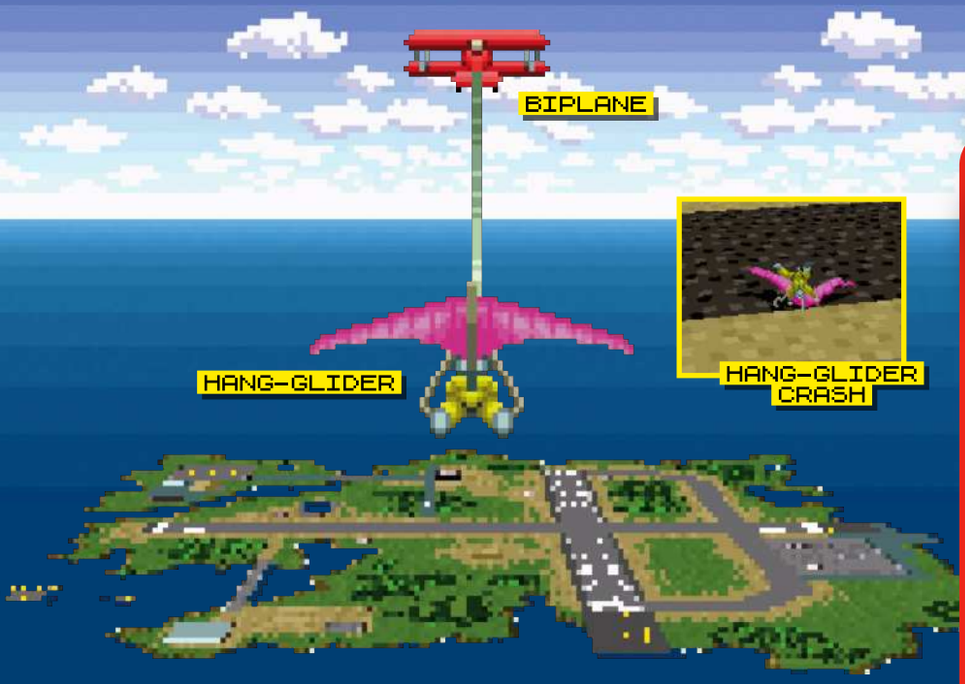
Nintendo's timing was shrewd: Sega had launched its Mega Drive less than a month earlier, now suddenly here was the successor to Nintendo's Famicom, the system that gave Japan *Dragon Quest* and national hysteria. The Super Famicom and its promised on-screen colours, resolution and touted Mode 7 feature captured *Famitsu*'s interest – the magazine actually explained its capabilities in terms of how many *Dragon Quest* characters could be displayed. Sega's new hardware? Nintendo had in effect strived to give a slow-acting 'dim mak' ('touch of death') to its rival – never mind that the Super Famicom wouldn't even launch for another two years.

Trawling that 1988 *Famitsu* report reveals little in the way of actual Super Famicom games, apart from one called *Dragonfly*. Over 16 pages, this demo was given at least 45 screenshots. There were no new *Mario*, new *Zelda*, nor new *Dragon Quest* images – all the focus was on *Dragonfly*'s various demos. Other magazines followed in announcing the Super Famicom, also focusing on *Dragonfly*. The name would eventually change, but the red biplane shown in screens was unmistakably the same one players would fly in *Pilotwings*. For you see, *Dragonfly* is the unreleased precursor of what would ultimately become *Pilotwings*.

Press enthusiasm at the time is unsurprising, given that according to *Gamest* magazine the highest-grossing game(s) in Japanese arcades in 1988 – arcades being the then-usual barometer of technological progress – was still *After Burner* and *After Burner II*, which had been released the preceding year. Although *After Burner* received numerous home ports, there was nothing in the market capable of replicating the grandeur of the arcade original. So in November 1988, to witness *Dragonfly*'s rotating and scaling landscapes, and know this was destined for home use, it would have seemed revolutionary. *Famitsu* made a point of comparing *Dragonfly* and *After Burner* on page 99 of that special report issue. *After Burner* was an impressive, though linear, aerial shooter for arcades, whereas Nintendo was promising free-roaming flight with similarly impressive visuals in your own room. Granted, the *Pilotwings* cartridge would contain a DSP-1 chip to make this all possible, but it represented the then-zenith of videogame technology.

What's interesting is *Dragonfly*'s continual metamorphosis that took place between November 1988 and July 1989, when Nintendo

» [SNES] We're not sure what these white blisters are supposed to represent, but the jetpack can bounce on them unharmed.




» [SNES] Take-offs are easy. Landings are also fairly easy – this isn't *Microsoft Flight Simulator*, it's more casual.

gave a second major demonstration of the hardware, until its eventual Japanese release as *Pilotwings* in December 1990, a month after the Super Famicom launch. For the July 1989 event, Nintendo showed off what would become *Super Mario World*, in addition to a rather different-looking *Dragonfly*. The game had not a red biplane as before, but instead an insect-like vehicle, complete with transparent wings, and a HUD that displayed missiles and shields. Now it was about action, with the craft shown hovering above a futuristic battleship and strafing ground targets. Ultimately, this version would never come out, and the concept regressed to what was shown before – the red biplane, runways and a relaxed atmosphere. Though unreleased, graphics assets for this lost incarnation of *Dragonfly* were discovered in the 2020 Nintendo data leak. While no playable version has been found, yet, enthusiasts have taken these graphics and created accurate mock-ups as well as sprite animations.

# The Sky's The Limit

## Master Pilotwings with these tips

### MINIGAMES BOOST POINTS

If you find yourself struggling to reach your point quota for a stage, try accessing the hidden minigames by landing on special targets. Although difficult, it will net that vehicle a full 100-score-plus extra! The jetpack is easiest, the parachute challenging – don't even bother with the glider.

### GET TO DA CHOPPER!

You are not Robert Duval and this is not *Apocalypse Now*. You will get killed if you rush the combat missions. Complete these super slowly; you have ample fuel so there's no real time limit. Enemies only attack when visible on-screen, so destroy them one at a time, including the invisible ones.

### THE BIG STUFF

No one likes to miss a ring when skydiving, but the points are small compared to your landing. If you miss a couple, don't sweat it. Whatever the mission, always focus on the biggest scoring criteria. Better to lose a few points for taking too long than miss a juicy landing.

### TAP THAT GLIDER

The glider is the hardest vehicle in any stage, especially the landings. Tap the brake repeatedly – don't hold it – to reduce speed in a controlled fashion without stalling. We landed the glider on a special target to unlock its minigame only once, and it was with this tapping method.

### RUNWAY DRIVING

It's important to come to a standstill as close to the centre as possible when landing the biplane. If you've done a perfect flight but find yourself near the runway edge after touchdown, don't be afraid to increase throttle slightly and taxi to the centre. It'll coax a few extra points.

# The Sequels

Can you believe there's only three games?

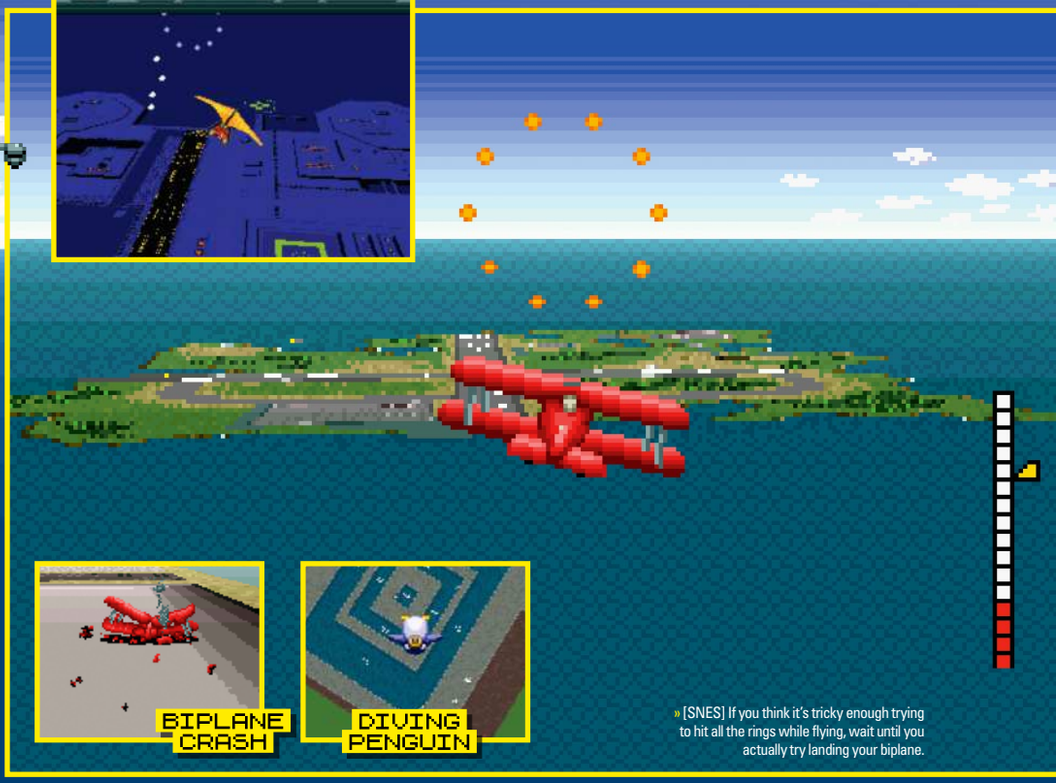
## PILOTWINGS 64

Controversial alternate opinion: *Pilotwings 64* was the better launch game. *Super Mario 64* is amazing, but there's not much to do after you grab all 120 stars. With *Pilotwings 64* you could invent your own goals. Gyrocopter barnstorming, landing the glider on smokestacks, racing the rocket in a jetpack – your imagination is the limit!

## PILOTWINGS RESORT

Roughly 15 years after the N64 sequel there was this 3DS release. The presentation, physics and controls are all very nice, but this feels like a missed opportunity. It recycles Wuhu Island from *Wii Sports Resort*, meaning there's only one stage instead of four, which severely reduces the variety from the two previous games.

JETPACK




BIPLANE CRASH


DIVING PENGUIN

» [SNES] If you think it's tricky enough trying to hit all the rings while flying, wait until you actually try landing your biplane.

BIRDMAN 2

» [SNES] This is the landing for the birdman minigame. We attempted it multiple times and only landed it once.

# Marvellous Minigames

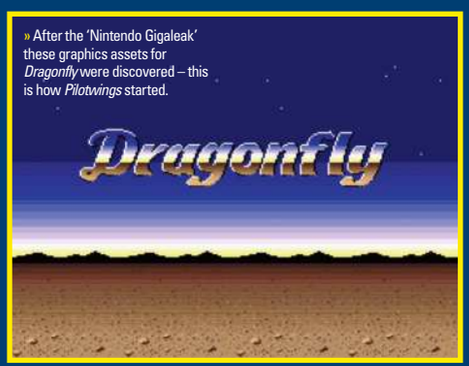
## BIRDMAN BOUNCE

The easiest minigame to access, you just need to land the jetpack on the moving platform. There are a few different variations of course layout but they all involve bouncing on 'P squares' for extra points, bouncing over long distances via yellow trampolines, then landing in the watery target zone.

## PENGUIN DIVE

Difficult to access, since it requires parachuting onto a small green moving platform, but not impossible. Afterwards, you manoeuvre a diving penguin into a target pool. There's several different pool layouts, randomly chosen. Do not get greedy and aim for the 70 point pool, 50 points is easier and still plenty.

The US received *Pilotwings* as a Super Nintendo launch title in August 1991, while Europe received it later in 1992, nearly four years after the Japanese public first glimpsed it. When *Pilotwings* eventually emerged in its final form, critics' reactions ranged from good to fantastic. Japan's *Famitsu*, which had printed all those screenshots from its public unveiling, scored it a reasonable 30/40 (equivalent to 75%). *Electronic Gaming Monthly* in America gave a similar 8/7/8/8 score across four reviewers in its 1992 *Video Game Buyer's Guide*. Ed Semrad was the dissenting voice on page 55, scoring it seven and complaining about the game's lack of challenge. To put this in context, one of the highest-scoring games in that same guide was *Battletoads* on NES, scoring straight nines, which is regarded as one of the most difficult games ever made. In the UK, the magazines *Mean Machines*, *Super Play* and *Total!* all scored *Pilotwings* in the 90% range, while *Games World* on TV used *Pilotwings* for competitive play, as contestants tried to beat each other's mission scores.




» After the 'Nintendo Gigaleak' these graphics assets for *Dragonfly* were discovered – this is how *Pilotwings* started.

» [SNES] The nighttime level looks very pretty – the glowing lights below are even animated!

» [SNES] The jetpack has two camera modes: behind the player and, as shown here, from above.

**It's very easy to look back on these reviews with a raised eyebrow.** It was a different time, with dissimilar societal norms and values, and what was written should be held up within the context of its era, not present-day standards. Even acknowledging this though, we can't help but feel that maybe some reviewers weren't approaching *Pilotwings* with the right frame of mind. Some of the late-game missions are extremely challenging, but where *Pilotwings* truly shines is in conveying a sense of aerial freedom and the innate pleasure of controlling its vehicles. Whether it's the biplane, jetpack, parachute or hang-glider, the responsiveness of that d-pad coupled with a smooth chill-out jazz soundtrack is an exquisite feeling. Keep in mind the SNES had no analogue joystick with which to replicate real aeroplane controls, and yet despite this, everything handles precisely as you would expect and want. Obviously, the game's main goal is reaching score quotas through mission objectives but, every so often, it transcends its own rules to become something blithe and wonderful, hinting at the majesty to be realised in *Pilotwings 64*. Today, there are many serious or more challenging flight simulators available, but players continue to enjoy the original *Pilotwings* specifically because its focus is on creating a sense of delight. (However, if you really want a test, try accessing the birdman stage via the hang-glider missions.)

The last US and European SNES games were released in 1998, a decade after the hardware was first shown. In Japan, the last Super Famicom title was released in November 2000, meaning it almost outlived even Sega's Saturn (its last game was *Yuukyuu Gensoukyoku*, December 2000). Nintendo's little grey console instilled itself in the collective consciousness of all players internationally, and by extension so did the hardware's early games which included *Pilotwings*. This 16-bit machine was part of the gaming landscape throughout the decade of the Nineties, both in and of itself and also by defining the creation of Sony's PlayStation. You can't talk about PlayStation without acknowledging the Super Famicom, and it all started with that demo of *Pilotwings* in 1988, tentatively named *Dragonfly*.

Its enduring idea of allowing anyone at home the sensation of flight went a long way, through several fundamental revisions before release, and evolving with two sequels. While the original *Pilotwings* has since seen re-release via download on Wii, Wii U, 3DS and Switch, the series has not had a mainline release since *Pilotwings Resort* in 2011. Which is a shame, when you consider its origin and legacy. Who knows, maybe one day we'll get to fly the skies again in a new release, or maybe even in the unreleased *Dragonfly* itself. ✱

Special thanks to **www.chrismcovell.com** for giving permission to trawl through and reprint anything from its *Dragonfly* archives.

## Unbeknownst to many players are these hidden curiosities!

### BIRDMAN FLAP

We don't even want to think about how many times we tried to access this – it's almost impossible. You need to complete a glider mission, then land on the minuscule alternative platform surrounded by water. Madness! Afterwards, flap your wings to fly the birdman as far as possible.

1UP
44000
HIGH
44000
2UP
REMAIN
P 01
PRESS
START

# Contra

## THE CHIPS CAN WAIT

» ARCADE » 1987 » KONAMI

**I've often mentioned Quay Amusements in the mag, as it's an arcade where I spent many of my formative years, so it left a big impression on me.** There was another place I used to hang out to play arcade games and it was a chip shop of all places. While the takeaway in question is still there, it has now become a more generic chicken fast food place – it also lacks the arcade machines it used to have, which makes me rather sad.

I'm not sure if the original owner liked arcade games, or just saw them as good business sense, but my local chippy at the top of Herbert Avenue was unusual because it had two arcade cabinets and there were always good games in there to play. While I rarely got to buy many portions of chips, I always seemed to find enough ten pences to enjoy an arcade game and I got to experience *Frogger*, *The New Zealand Story* and countless other classics at that little chippy. One of my favourites though was discovering *Contra* for the very first time.

My mum was treating us to a rare meal of sausage and chips and I'd been allowed some money to play on the arcade machines while we waited, and that's when I discovered Konami's game. I remember being instantly drawn to the title screen with its likenesses of Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger and things became even better once I started playing. *Contra* not only has a nice and gritty aesthetic but also exceptionally satisfying weaponry and my incoming food was soon forgotten as I ploughed through the first level, taking delight in discovering what each new weapon did as I off-loaded it into any enemy stupid enough to run into my path.

The highlight of that first play however was reaching the second stage and discovering the perspective shifted from its side-on view to a pseudo-3D screen where enemies would run back and forth in the distance and you'd gun them down, before running into the next area. It felt fantastic and although I quickly lost my remaining lives upon reaching the boss, that stage left a huge impression on me, so I was delighted to learn just how authentic the Amstrad CPC conversion was when I discovered it many months later. But that's a story for another time. *

# THE EVOLUTION OF BATTLETOADS

In order to take on the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, artist Kevin Bayliss created the Battletoads, and their NES debut went on to spawn a series. Kevin and Rare's Paul Machacek join reboot director AJ Grand-Scrutton to discuss the franchise's evolution

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

**KEVIN BAYLISS**

» *Battletoads* creator Kevin Bayliss is making a musical comic tribute called *Salamandos* with musician David Wise.

**PAUL MACHACEK**

» Paul Machacek worked on several *Battletoads* projects, and provided QA for the reboot released in 2020.

**AJ GRAND-SCRUTTON**

» Dlala Studios founder AJ Grand-Scrutton directed the recent *Battletoads* reboot, and has ideas for a sequel.

**Unlike today, there was no such thing as instant information in the early Nineties, and so Rare founder Tim Stamper first became aware of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* well after they had become a US craze.** Given his firm's focus on NES development for the American market, and its desire to create its own IP, it follows that Tim's response was to brainstorm a NES title around a team to rival the popular turtles, as Rare's Paul Machacek recalls. "Tim had just been to the CES (Consumer Electronics Show) in the US, where he had witnessed first-hand how big the *TMNT* franchise was," Paul notes. "I recall a conversation with Tim, Mark Betteridge, Kevin Bayliss and myself, where there was an understanding that a frog or toad-based game with fighting would be the initial direction. Tim's close working relationship with Mark was going to continue into this game, and Kev was then responsible for the look of the characters."

Reflecting on his inspirations for these amphibian brawlers, Kevin Bayliss cites both his childhood and teenage passions, the combination of which nicely fitted the brief. "When I was a kid I was heavily into natural history, and the wildlife pond in my back garden," Kevin beams. "It was like a world of tiny monsters, and I'd often draw or paint them afterwards. My favourites were the frogs, toads and newts, because they were like miniature versions of Fifties B-movie dinosaurs. I was also a huge martial arts fan in my teens, and my absolute hero was Bruce Lee."

Of course, Kevin still had to combine these two disparate subjects in an aesthetically pleasing way, and it wasn't until his second run at it that his boss gave his approval. "I drew a mixture of my two main interests, and scribbled out a picture of three frogs on a lily pad holding nunchucks and swords, with the title 'The Amphibi-uns,'" Kevin reveals. "It was ambiguous, and so it meant that I could also introduce newts and salamanders. Tim liked the idea but hated the name, so we came up with 'Battletoads', and decided to steer them away from martial arts and make them a little more futuristic and fantastical."

Beyond the look and tone of the Battletoads, Kevin developed and differentiated the characters after taking inspiration from one of his favourite console titles. "I loved playing the PC Engine game *China Warrior*, which featured a Bruce Lee-type character," Kevin enthuses. "Occasionally you could make his fist 'grow,' and create a powered-up punch. So I decided to do something like that with the toads, and drew them with arms that became axes, drills and all kinds of dangerous objects. It was a great way to give each toad a different identity."

The beat-'em-up in Kevin's mind was taking shape on paper, but *Battletoads*' designer Tim Stamper preferred a slightly different direction, and so a compromise was made. "I'd played a lot of *Double Dragon* in the arcades," Kevin remembers, "but Tim wanted more variety, and began planning out different ideas while I concentrated on the fighting elements. I think if I'd worked on the game alone it would probably have been more of a fighter and less of a platformer! However, it was fun to work on the different genres, and I don't know if

» [NES] Although it spans multiple genres, *Battletoads* begins as an out-and-out beat-'em-up with over-the-top attacks.

» [Arcade] The main influence for the beat-'em-up elements in *Battletoads* was the original *Double Dragon* coin-op.

"I drew a mixture of my two main interests, and scribbled out a picture of three frogs on a lily pad holding nunchucks and swords"
**KEVIN BAYLISS**

## STAGES OF EVOLUTION: CRAZY COMBAT

RASH, ZITZ AND PIMPLE'S MOST OVER-THE-TOP ATTACKS

### BATTLETOADS (GAME BOY)

Zitz dispatches foes with the Big Bad Boot in his solo Game Boy mission, where his DM expands and kicks them off the screen. He also has the Anvil Slam, where his hand morphs into a giant anvil to squash leeches with, and the Jet Ski Swing, where he uses a Jet Ski as a baseball bat!

### BATTLETOADS IN BATTLEMANIACS

Pimple's Battletoad Butt move in *Battlemaniacs* sees him sprout huge ram horns that send enemies flying. His other special attacks in the game include the BT Big Hammer, where his fist becomes a mighty mallet, and the Wun-Tun Stomp, where his stamping foot turns into a heavy weight.

### BATTLETOADS (ARCADE)

Rash's goriest *Battletoads* coin-op attack is the Steel Claw Strike, where he rips fallen foes apart. His other arcade moves of note are the Spiked Boot Thrust – the Big Bad Boot with spikes! – and the Flying Battleaxe, where his foot turns into an axe that he can behead a boss with.

## STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

# ECLECTIC CHALLENGES

FROM SPEEDER BIKES AND DREADNOUGHTS TO JEFF SLEDS!

### BATTLETOADS

The joy of *Battletoads* is that isn't just a beat-'em-up; it's a multi-genre title. It tasks you with winching your way down a deep enemy-filled shaft, and ascending a hazardous rotating tower, but its most memorable challenge involves negotiating an obstacle course on a speeder bike.

### BATTLETOADS/ DOUBLE DRAGON

The *Battletoads* crossover retains the original's shafts and speeder bikes, but it also introduces tests of agility like hanging onto ledges and inching through enemy territory. It has a shoot-'em-up stage too, like the Game Boy *Battletoads*, where you take on a dreadnought in space.

### BATTLETOADS (2020)

Besides its 3D speeder bike stage, the reboot has logistical puzzles, old-school platforming and a menial jobs challenge, where the toads become a masseuse and an office drone. It also challenges you to ride an unconscious diplomat called Jeff like a sled over brick, ice and sponge!

▶ it would be remembered in the same way if it had just been a beat-'em-up."

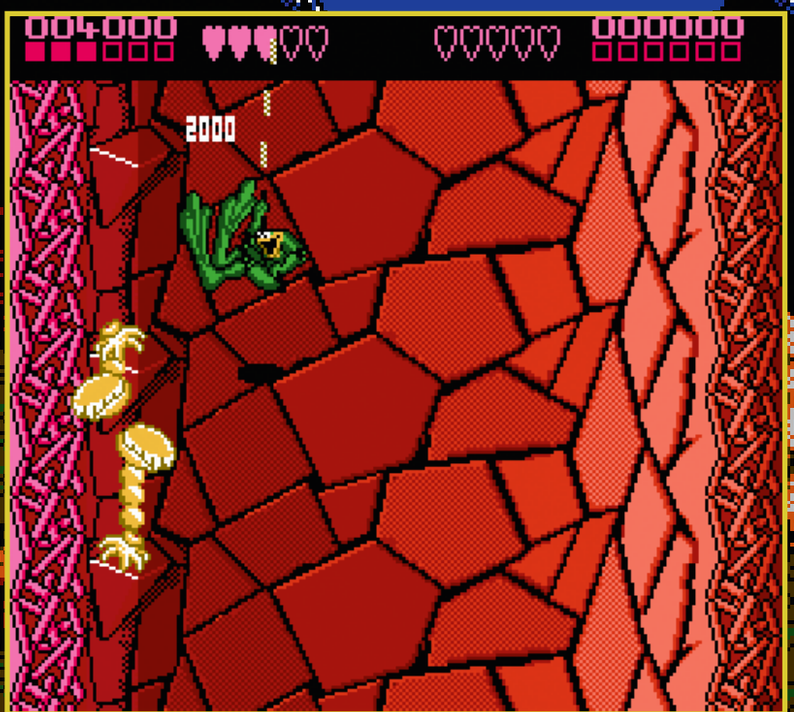
Tim Stamper pulled out all the stops while spanning genres with his *Battletoads* level designs, which included an oddly named stage set in a deep and dangerous shaft. "Tim was always looking at ways to create different-styled levels," Kevin points out. "I'd go into his office and see a huge piece of paper on his drawing board with the sections of walls drawn out set to move in parallax to create Wookie Hole, and I could immediately see that this opened up more fun opportunities. He loved playing with 3D effects, and Mark Betteridge was great at putting his ideas together in such a way that the controls felt just right."

***Battletoads* wowed visitors at its CES debut, with some asking if it really ran on a NES.** A Game Boy port was planned, until Paul Machacek pitched a unique sequel. "The engineering work had to be done from scratch, and for the sake of a little extra design and some new art we could have a separate title that fans of the NES one might also buy," Paul reasons. "The first stage had a strong feel of the opening NES level to give players a familiar feel, although with a new layout. Then after that we had fast-paced chases, vertical scrolling avoid/kill levels and aerial combat."

With aerial combat came the introduction of a genre not seen in the NES original, as the Game Boy follow-up added variety with a series of shoot-'em-up stages. "Being able to shoot enemies was the next logical step," Paul considers, "so we added flying and space-based levels. At the end of the first stage your toad jumped into a flying vehicle and navigated through gaps in walls while avoiding or shooting things. That ended with a boss that you defeated by destroying specific sections, but it didn't look violent enough when you shot it, so I made the screen shake more to emphasise the point!"

» [Game Boy] The Game Boy *Battletoads* is different from the NES original, and includes a shoot-'em-up stage.

The handheld *Battletoads* title differentiated itself further with a level where the player's toad was chased through a series of tunnels by a boulder, or so it seemed. "Oh dear! It wasn't a boulder, it was a brain," Paul sighs, "and the tunnel was a giant worm's intestine. Some of the ideas in the brain chase came from increasingly complex tricks I was developing to create visual effects. We had paths at 45-degree angles, where you ran left/right or dropped off edges or jumped up over corners – and the brain cheated! It would play tricks to catch up if it was off-screen for too long." Although the Game Boy




» [NES] One of the first non-fighting challenges in *Battletoads* sees you abseiling down an enemy-infested shaft.

*Battletoads* reused the original's box art, reviews noted that it was a system exclusive, and it led on to a tie-in with a main inspiration for the series. "Our agent in Miami – Joel Hochberg – had been signing up all sorts of IPs for several years at this point," Paul explains. "We had worked with the publisher Tradewest for some time too, which had already published *Double Dragon*, and in an effort to keep putting out *Battletoads* games it was decided that a tie-up between the two franchises should be made."

There was, however, a certain amount of adjustment made to the proven *Battletoads* formula, in that the addition of another franchise meant toning down the crazy. "We'd make the fists, boots and explosions bigger – it was over-the-top cartoonish stuff!" Paul says of the previous titles. "Then we had to put someone else's slightly more sensible IP into it, which probably brought it back down to earth a bit more. When we introduced characters from a more traditional beat-'em-up we had to put them in and hope they could survive a toad vs pig world. So it became a blend of the two franchises' styles."

**As well as tonal tweaks, the eclectic gameplay that the first two *Battletoads* games were known for was reined in slightly for the crossover title.** "*Double Dragon* was a beat-'em-up, so we had to sway more in that direction from the quite diverse *Battletoads* gameplay we'd created by that point," Paul acknowledges. "So there was only so far we were allowed to go, although they did have a punch-up on the outside of a spaceship! But from an artistic point of view, the tie-up wouldn't have been my choice, as I wasn't a big fighting game fan, even though I had written several games with fighting elements."

> "We had worked with Tradewest, which had published Double Dragon, and it was decided that a tie-up between the two franchises should be made"
> **PAUL MACHACEK**

Two further *Battletoads* games followed, although *Ragnarok's World* was a Game Boy version of the original, and *Battlemaniacs* for the SNES was an enhanced port with tweaked level designs and combat. "When I was originally asked to port the NES game to the Game Boy I refused, and wrote something else for the Game Boy with Kev called *Battletoads*," Paul recollects. "A while later I ended up porting the original but under an awkwardly different name – *Ragnarok's World*. Mark had moved onto *Killer Instinct* by then, and so Brendan Gunn was drafted in to code *Battlemaniacs*. It used computer rendering done with SGI machines, as we were learning how to do that stuff and had been for a couple of years. *Battlemaniacs* was also a target-hardware step beyond what we'd done before on the NES and Game Boy, so it allowed us to work with the rendering tech in a stronger way."

An even more ambitious project saw Kevin Bayliss working on a *Battletoads* coin-op, which if left to the artist would have been entirely different from its predecessors. "Originally I wanted to create a one-on-one vs fighter," Kevin discloses, "but Tim wanted a little more variety to keep it in line with the NES game. ▶

» [Game Boy] Like the original game, there's a frantic chase through a maze in the Game Boy *Battletoads*.

» [SNES] Of all the original console *Battletoads* titles, *Battletoads/Double Dragon* involves the most fighting.

» [SNES] *Battlemaniacs* is essentially a tweaked version of the NES *Battletoads* with nicer visuals and music.

» [SNES] There are bonus pods scattered around *Battletoads/Double Dragon* that give you points and lives.

So Chris Sutherland, Gregg Mayles and I added ice caverns with slopes, a big 3D boss battle and a horizontal shooter level with some of the first 3D rendered videogame graphics. We played with sprite scaling a lot too, to add depth and perspective."

But while it had non-fighting stages, the arcade *Battletoads* was still more of a brawler than the previous games, and so its designers played to its intended older audience. "We wanted to give the toads a harder edge to compete with the other games in the arcades at the time, which were pretty violent," Kevin observes. "My favourite parts were the drilling of the heads and General Vermin literally getting grabbed by the goolies! I tried to get as much humour in there as possible to prevent it becoming too dark, and because the enemies were monsters it allowed us to have plenty of fun like that."

**Sadly, the *Battletoads* coin-op arrived after scrolling beat-'em-ups had waned, and the series stalled with it.** Then two decades later, one of the toads was given a cameo. "I loved the rendition of Rash for *Killer Instinct* Season 3," Kevin grins, "and I felt so proud when I saw him added to a game I'd designed and built the original characters for. Especially after I had sweated in a motion-capture suit for so many hours and so often injured myself creating the graphics! I hope the other two toads – and possibly some of their villains – make their way into the *Killer Instinct* arena at some point too."

Working hard in the background to bring all three *Battletoads* back was Dlala Studios CEO AJ Grand-Scrutton, who had been a fan long before rebooting the series in 2020. "The very first *Battletoads* game I played was the *Battletoads/Double Dragon* crossover," AJ reminisces. "That was on the NES, and I've got a lot of memories of me and my cousin Jamie playing that. We used to rent *Battletoads/Double Dragon* a lot. But when I really fell in love with the series was when I discovered the original *Battletoads*. I really enjoyed the first three levels, but then you'd get to the turbo tunnel!"

When it came to reimagining the series, AJ brought in two former *Earthworm Jim* artists to give the toads a new look, which led to the reboot riffing on classic cartoons. "Mike Dietz and Ed Schofield are really good friends," AJ explains, "and I got them to do a load of exploration around the character design. So we had these great, over-the-top cartoony characters, and I really drove the art direction from there. The original *Battletoads* had these big Tex Avery expressions, so we kept some of that, and I loved Nineties/early Noughties cartoons when I was younger, and so that was

» [Arcade] Aside from a few fun diversions, the *Battletoads* coin-op is a beat-'em-up from start to finish.

» [Arcade] The deep shaft in the arcade *Battletoads* riffs on the original's, but involves more fighting.

PIMPLES
"Pimple is the big bruiser, but we wanted him to have some flair, so we gave him his big train morph and sarcophagus drop"
AJ GRAND-SCRUTTON

» [PC] The overhauled combat in the *Battletoads* reboot includes tag-teams, combos and a kitchen sink attack!

where that influence came in." The designer also wanted to update the combat from previous *Battletoads* games to reflect trends in beat-'em-ups, which required analysis of the toads' different styles. "We looked at the characters' personalities," AJ reviews, "and thought about what their fighting styles should be. So Zitz is quick and punchy, and Rash is a bit of a loose cannon, where it doesn't look like he knows what he's doing but there's actually a lot of skill behind it. Then Pimple is the big bruiser, but we wanted him to have some flair, so we gave him his big train morph and sarcophagus drop."

**In keeping with the original *Battletoads*, the reboot spanned genres, with one of its stages tapping into the past glories of the follow-up's celebrated character designers.** "You rarely played one genre in the original *Battletoads* for more than one or two levels in a row, so I wanted to make a genre mashup," AJ considers. "So we had menial jobs, where you massaged an alien, or you were bobsledding on the back of an unconscious diplomat! Then bringing it back to *Earthworm Jim*, I loved those bonus levels with Jim on his rocket, so we looked at the turbo tunnel through that lens."

Although made nearly 30 years after the original, Dlala didn't struggle to make its *Battletoads* feel authentic, which AJ puts down to the eclectic nature of the series. "Once we had these three stupid toads morphing into different things we got a little bit of a cheat code," AJ feels, "because we instantly got something that started feeling like *Battletoads*. When Rare was making the original series, it made games that each felt different, and I feel we kept that tradition going with *Battletoads 2020*. We came out of that with a great relationship with Rare, and I'd 100% love to jump back into the *Battletoads* universe."

» [Game Boy] Despite having a different name, *Battletoads In Ragnarok's World* is actually a conversion of the NES original.

The creator of the toads Kevin Bayliss rates the reboot very highly, but also has praise for the NES original, in particular what it achieved on Eighties hardware. "You have to remember what the NES was capable of before you compare it to anything you can buy today," Kevin qualifies. "Even modern 'retro' stuff isn't really a fair comparison, because there's no limitation on what you can create now. But look at the variety in *Battletoads* – it's so colourful, and the music by David Wise is 'toadally' awesome! It was way ahead of its time in a lot of ways, and it was really pushing it!"

» [Xbox One] Rash represents the Battletoads in season three of the *Killer Instinct* reboot for Xbox One.

## STAGES OF EVOLUTION: WHO'S THE BOSS?

RAT CHIEFS, STONE PIGS AND BATTLING BULLS

### BATTLETOADS

The boss encounters in *Battletoads* vary. There's one-on-one combat with the anthropomorphic bull General Slaughter and the head of the Dark Queen's rat army Big Blag, but the walker in the first boss fight has a ranged weapon, and in the final showdown the queen turns into a tornado.

### BATTLETOADS IN BATTLEMANIACS

Bosses are thin on the ground in *Battlemaniacs*, but its two mayors are memorable. Rocky sounds cute, but he's actually a gigantic pig made of rock who's intent on crushing the toads. Then there's the Dark Queen, who fires deadly projectiles while teleporting around her stone tower.

### BATTLETOADS (ARCADE)

The coin-op sees recurring villains Big Blag and General Slaughter return, but its arcade hardware allows the toads to throw them straight into the screen! One notable new boss in the title is a massive snake called Karnath, whose attack involves mauling the toads with its fangs.

# Hardware Heaven

# SG-1000

**» MANUFACTURER:** Sega **» YEAR:** 1983
**» COST:** ¥15,000 (launch), £390+ (today, boxed), £350+ (today, unboxed)

**Having achieved success in the arcade business, Sega was looking for ways to expand its business using its gaming expertise.** It initially settled on the idea of creating an 8-bit home computer for entry-level users, eventually released as the SC-3000, but soon learned that Nintendo was planning to launch a home console. Inspired to enter the market itself, Sega created a console version of the SC-3000 with no keyboard and a single built-in joystick controller. However, the company did allow an upgrade path, with an expansion port for a keyboard peripheral, as well as a port for a second joystick.

The SG-1000 launched in the same month as Nintendo's Famicom and initially fared well. The technology Sega had chosen was similar to that of the ColecoVision and MSX, and was pretty well-suited to games. The console exceeded Sega's sales expectations by selling 160,000 units in its first year, and the revised SG-1000 II was introduced in July 1984, but Nintendo soon began to pull ahead as the Famicom was technologically superior and had a greater game library due to its third-party support. SG-1000 releases slowed following the launch of the backwards compatible Sega Mark III in 1985, and stopped in 1987. ★

## ESSENTIAL GAME
### Zaxxon

This isometric shooter had been a hit in arcades more or less immediately following its Japanese launch in December 1981, so we're surprised that Sega didn't actually use a conversion to launch its home console. Looking at *Congo Bongo* though, the developers may have struggled with isometric games initially. Thankfully, *Zaxxon* on the SG-1000 nails it. While the SG-1000 can't match the smooth scrolling of the coin-op game, it nails it in most other respects and is generally better than other contemporary versions. Better yet, it's a cartridge game so you won't need a Card Catcher to play it on an original SG-1000.

## SG-1000 fact

■ Though the SG-1000 was primarily marketed in Japan, the console also saw release in Australia via John Sands Electronics, New Zealand via Grandstand Leisure, as well as some European nations.

**PROCESSOR:** ZILOG Z80A 8-BIT CPU (3.58 MHZ)

**MEMORY:** 1KB MAIN RAM, 2KB VIDEO RAM

**GRAPHICS:** TEXAS INSTRUMENTS TMS9918 (256X192 RESOLUTION, 16 COLOURS, 32 SINGLE-COLOUR SPRITES)

**AUDIO:** TEXAS INSTRUMENTS SN76489 (THREE PSG CHANNELS PLUS NOISE GENERATOR)

**MEDIA:** ROM CARTRIDGE (UP TO 128KB), SEGA MYCARD OPTIONAL

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

# THE RETRO GAMER GUIDE TO commodore 64

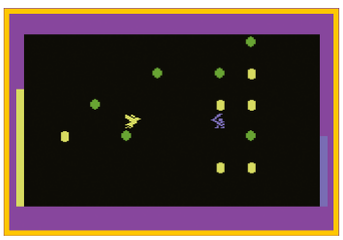
It may not have been designed as a games machine, but games dominated the C64 and turned it into a fertile breeding ground for modern developers. 40 years on, we revisit its greatest hits

WORDS BY DARRAN JONES

**Commodore's 8-bit home computer made a huge impact when it landed 40 years ago in 1982.** The company was no stranger to the 8-bit market, having already released systems like the Commodore Pet and VIC-20, but Commodore's owner, Jack Tramiel, wanted to dominate the market, and he aggressively marketed the C64, cutting its price by $200 a few months after its release, as well as using a casing that was extremely similar to the C64's predecessor, the Commodore VIC-20.

The C64 may have looked extremely similar to the humble VIC-20, but there were huge differences beneath the bread bin-like exterior. For starters, it featured a whopping 64KB of RAM with an additional 20KB of ROM, better resolution and incredible sound thanks to the SID (Sound Interface Device) chip, which allowed talented musicians like Rob Hubbard and Ben Daglish to create incredible tunes for the machine.

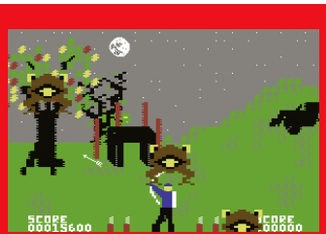
The C64 would eventually go on to shift over 30 million units, making it the best-selling home micro of its time. It might not have been designed as a pure games machine, but that's what it's arguably best remembered for. So here are some of the finest games the C64 has to offer. If you've ever considered collecting for it then these titles are the perfect place to start.

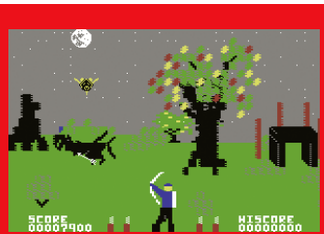


## ARCHON: THE LIGHT AND THE DARK 1983

**ELECTRONIC ARTS**

If you glanced at *Archon* really quickly you'd probably mistake it for an ugly game of chess. Look past its basic visuals, however, and you'll discover a surprisingly gripping strategy game where fantastical monsters battle each other to control five strategic power points in order to win the game. Alternatively, you can simply eliminate all of your opponent's creatures, which is much more satisfying.

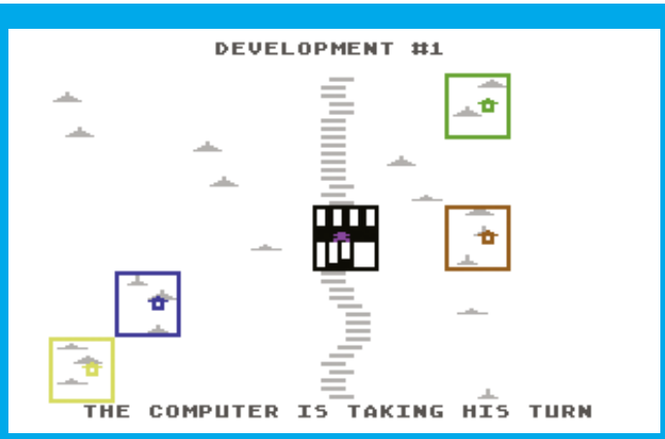




## FORBIDDEN FOREST 1983

**COSMI CORPORATION**

This early offering from Paul Norman features huge animated sprites, slick parallax scrolling, cool pseudo sprite scaling and even day and night cycles. It's not the prettiest game in the world, but it's exceptionally atmospheric and creates a building sense of dread as the later enemies (which range from giant spiders to dragons and demogorgons) come at you thick and fast. Despite the danger, you only have a limited number of arrows, so you need to make sure that every shot counts.




## MULE 1983

**ELECTRONIC ARTS**

Like several early C64 games, *MULE* started off on Atari's 8-bit range. Taking place on the planet Irata (Atari spelt backwards), you must use your MULE (Multiple Use Labour Element) to harvest various resources, all of which can potentially impact on your turn in some fashion. While the AI puts up a good fight, it's best played with friends.

## DINO EGGS 1983

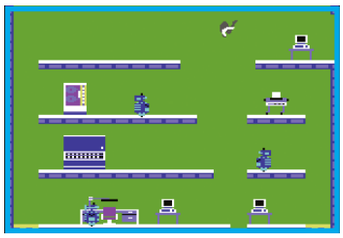
**MICRO FUN**

This platformer is surprisingly complex, but no less enjoyable for it. Playing a time traveller, you must collect dinosaur eggs to transport back to your present time to earn points. Rocks must be pushed away to uncover eggs (and hit nearby enemies), and you also need to build a fire to fend off the mother dinosaur, who shows up by way of a gigantic stomping foot.

## DROPZONE 1984

**US GOLD**

Archer Maclean's scintillating shooter may have liberally borrowed elements from *Defender* (even the font is the same), but it retains its own identity. Taking control of a jetpack-wearing hero, you zip across Jupiter's moon, picking up scientists while avoiding numerous enemies. It's the perfect twitch shooter and belongs in every C64 owner's library.



## IMPOSSIBLE MISSION 1984

**EPYX**

Elvin Atombender's taunting voice during the game's opening sounds a little less ominous nowadays, but Dennis Caswell's platformer is still exceedingly compelling to play. The aim is to infiltrate Atombender's lair by dodging robots and searching numerous pieces of furniture and machinery for the missing code pieces that must be assembled so you can shut down the computer in Atombender's control room. A sequel was released in 1988.

# PARADROID POWER

## Andrew Braybrook on his inventive 8-bit shooter

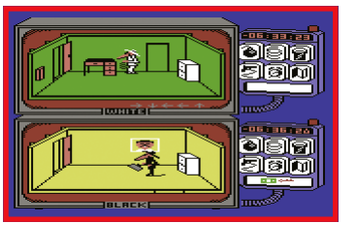
**_Paradroid_ successfully combines two distinct genres. Did you purposely try to create something different?**
I always followed my nose, trying to design a game that I would enjoy playing. I was more interested in using the technology to do something new. I would start with building the scrolling system and see what dropped out. This game was designed almost overnight as I walked home. I wrote down all the ideas I wanted to incorporate on one sheet of paper and all of those ideas went in.

**Where did _Paradroid_'s droid-swapping originate?**
I think the idea germinated from an arcade game we used to play where you played a commando who could leap into a tank and use it. When it got hit you had a couple of seconds to leap out before it blew up, and then you could go and find another tank. I quite liked the two different states and that you were protected by the tank. Having decided on the radar-style display for the robots, I could save all the complex graphical images for all the directions of movement. It also allowed a greater variety of weapons, though it wasn't expressed fully until _Paradroid 90_. I understand that a number of games have used a similar system since, so it must be quite appealing.

**What was the reasoning behind the update, _Heavy Metal Paradroid_?**
I was writing _Morpheus_, and had a 'curved metal' graphical

look that I had concocted in a graphics editor. It was early days for the game, and I didn't have a game system to experiment with, so I decided to substitute the _Paradroid_ background graphics with the _Morpheus_ ones. I had taken delivery of a Commodore 128, and one of the features on it was that you could switch the CPU into double-speed mode while the raster was off the screen, which bought about 30 per cent more processing time. So I wanted to get _Paradroid_'s scrolling a bit smoother. It turned out that I could get it running smoother even on a Commodore 64, and I really liked the new graphical look, so we did a new turbo loader and re-released _Paradroid_.

**Why do you think _Paradroid_ remains so popular with gamers today?**
I guess that everyone gets something different from a game. Maybe that's it. _Paradroid_ is a very dynamic game; even though each ship is set up broadly the same, it is running everything on each deck as you arrive so it plays differently every time. As a player, you also have a great deal of freedom as to how to tackle the ship as a whole and each deck individually.




### SPY VS SPY 1984
**FIRST STAR SOFTWARE**

This adaptation of the _Mad Magazine_ comic strip is an essential multiplayer experience. Your aim is to collect a set amount of items and make your way to an awaiting plane before your opponent does. While you can delay your rival spy by taking part in niggly hand-to-hand combat, it's far more fun to lay traps for the poor bugger instead. Several sequels followed.

### WINTER GAMES 1985
**EPYX**

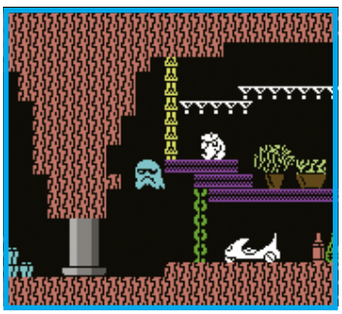
Epyx's sequel to _Summer Games_ cashed in on the Winter Olympics that had happened the previous year. While the figure skating is a little lame, the remaining seven events are all entertaining and include a diverse range like bobsled, ski jumping and the energy-sapping biathlon. It caters for up to eight players if you can find enough friends to join in.

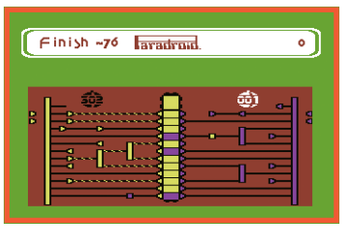
### THE PAWN 1985
**RAINBIRD**

Although graphic adventures truly shone on the 16-bit home computers, this absorbing offering from Magnetic Scrolls is certainly worth playing on the humble C64. While the artwork is of an incredibly high standard, it's the clever story, entertaining characters and fun writing that keeps you playing. Thank goodness the internet exists, though, as it's not as easy as we remember it.

### MONTY ON THE RUN 1985
**GREMLIN GRAPHICS**

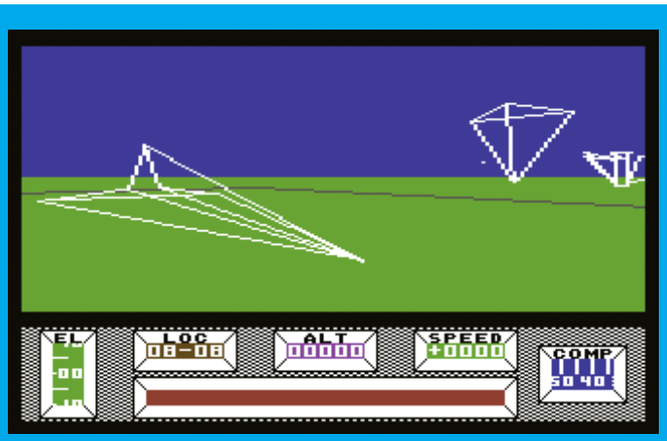
If you want your ears to love you forever then make sure they listen to Rob Hubbard's astonishing soundtrack, particularly the main theme. Inspired by Charles Williams' _Devil's Galop_, it's an insanely catchy tune that slowly builds in pace until it becomes impossible to stop humming along to. Oh, the game's good too…






### PARADROID 1985
**HEWSON CONSULTANTS**

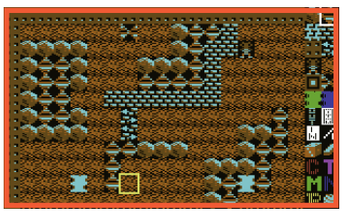
Andrew Braybrook's _Paradroid_ is an engaging blaster that combines his love of arcade shooters with something a little more thought-provoking. Playing as a lowly defence droid, you must make your way around the huge levels by hacking more powerful droids (via a neat minigame) and taking control of them. Interestingly, rather than simply try to aim for a high score, you can attempt to gain control of the unstable 999 droid for a more satisfying challenge.

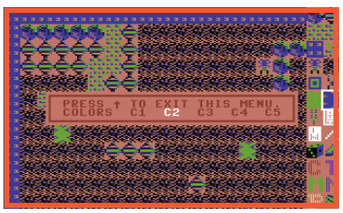



## MERCENARY: ESCAPE FROM TARG 1985

**NOVAGEN SOFTWARE**

Few games left a first impression like *Mercenary*. Famed at the time for its smart vector and polygonal graphics and its dynamic, open-ended gameplay, it has sadly gone on to outlive its creator, the private Paul Woakes. *Mercenary* still holds up well today, and was succeeded by two 16-bit sequels, *Damocles* and *Mercenary III*.






## BOULDER DASH CONSTRUCTION KIT 1985

**FIRST STAR SOFTWARE**

You don't realise how hard it is to create videogames until you use something like Peter Liepa's excellent level designer to make your own. In addition to being very simple to use (everything is icon driven), it also comes with additional caves and intermission screens to plough through, meaning you'll be entertained for absolutely ages. You're only really limited by your imagination.

## BOUNDER 1986

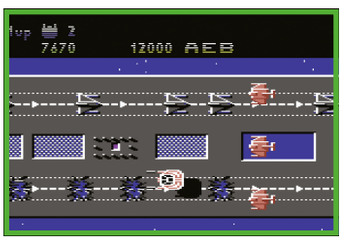
**GREMLIN GRAPHICS**

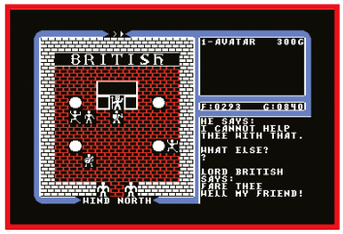
This quirky little offering from Christian Shrigley and Andrew Green is one of those joyously crazy concepts that could have only been thought up in the Eighties. Playing as a tennis ball, you must make your way through a continually scrolling stage bouncing on grey slabs while avoiding everything else. It's not easy at first, but you soon get into the swing of things, as you constantly look out for teleporters, jump bonuses and other useful power-ups.

## URIDIUM 1986

**HEWSON CONSULTANTS**

More arcade-inspired brilliance from Andrew Braybrook. While *Uridium* made it to several other 8-bit home computers, it truly shone on the Commodore 64. It boasts super-slick scrolling as your Manta zips above the huge ships, shooting down enemies and avoiding installations. It's fast and furious, and you'll need more than a little luck to reach the final stage. Interestingly, it also crops up on the NES with modified graphics as a tie-in for the 1984 film *The Last Starfighter*.



The ticket taker at the RenFair's gate starts to ask you for money, but upon spotting your Ankh says, 'Welcome, friend. Enter in peace and find your path.'

## ULTIMA IV: QUEST OF THE AVATAR 1986

**ORIGIN SYSTEMS**

There are several *Ultima* games on Commodore's machine, but the fourth outing is arguably the best in terms of its accessibility and structure. It shifts away from the simple combat-based dungeon-crawling elements of the earlier games in order to deliver an adventure that's rich with narrative nuance.

## LEADERBOARD GOLF 1986

**US GOLD**

The courses can take a little while to load, but *Leaderboard* still plays a mean round of golf. It's largely down to the beautifully refined swing mechanic that gives you a surprising amount of control over the ball, but it's also because of the exceptionally designed courses.

## MANIAC MANSION 1987

**LUCASFILM GAMES**

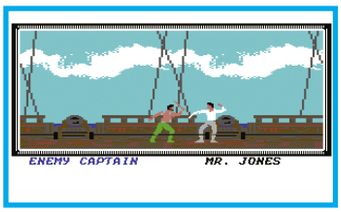
Ron Gilbert's innovative point-and-click adventure is still hilariously entertaining to play today. The first game to use the popular SCUMM engine is full of humour, has an array of zany characters to meet and turns a lot of typical adventure conventions on their heads. A sequel would appear six years later in the form of Tim Schafer's equally brilliant *Day Of The Tentacle*.

## SID MEIER'S PIRATES! 1987

**MICROPROSE SOFTWARE**

The first game to bear the Sid Meier moniker would indicate the quality you could expect from his later releases. It remains an enthralling open-world game that splices different genres and playing styles together while utilising a dynamic playing field that continually offers the player new choices as play progresses.

FINALLY, YOU ENCOUNTER SAILORS IN A PORTSIDE TAVERN. DOWN TO THEIR LAST FEW GOLD DOUBLOONS, "MATE," THEY CALL, "WELD US REFILL OUR PURSES. COME TELL US WHEN THE TREASURE FLEET ARRIVES AT HAVANA IN 1640, MR. JONES?"
PRESS TRIGGER TO CONTINUE



## BARBARIAN: THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR 1987

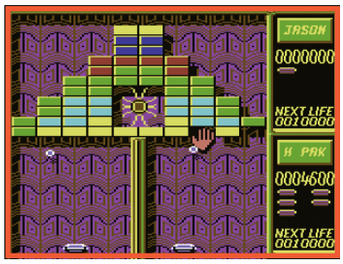
**PALACE SOFTWARE**

While its cover featuring a skimpily clad Maria Whittaker and Wolf from *Gladiators* drew controversy from anxious parents, *Barbarian*'s content was even more graphic. The blood that gushes forth from the wounds you receive might look a little tame now, but the game-ending decapitation of your opponent remains just as effective. The controls are great too, and you're able to pull off a surprising amount of moves via just one fire button.

## BATTY 1987

**ELITE SOFTWARE**

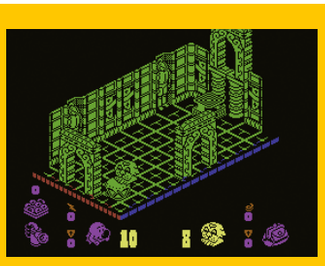
Although Batty is an *Arkanoid* clone, it's a far better one than most. This is mainly down to its tremendous two-player mode, which turns it into a truly entertaining affair. Your bat is extremely responsive, and there's a great selection of power-ups to discover, while the wall layouts are challenging but never unfair.

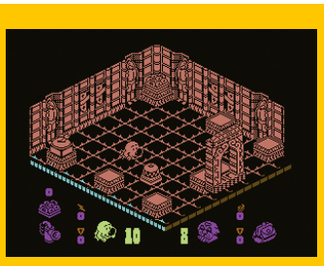


## BUBBLE BOBBLE 1987

**FIREBIRD**

We didn't want to fill this list with arcade ports, but there are several that deserve your attention. *Bubble Bobble* is certainly one of them, offering surprisingly authentic-looking visuals, a joyously bouncy rendition of the theme tune and seemingly intact gameplay. Blowing bubbles to trap enemies and then bursting them for points sounds simple, but it gets surprisingly tough on the later stages.





## HEAD OVER HEELS 1987

**OCEAN SOFTWARE**

Ignore the poor visuals and sluggish speed, as *Head Over Heels* remains an astoundingly good isometric adventure. Jon Ritman's game is full of charm and fiendishly designed stages, and is amplified by the late Bernie Drummond's excellent pixel work. It's a real adventure just getting the two alien agents together, and then the real fun begins.

## CALIFORNIA GAMES 1987

**EPYX**

Its number of events may be paltry, but *California Games* is superb fun all the same. All six events (which include surfing, roller-skating, half-pipe, footbag, BMX and flying disc) play to a high standard, and have super-responsive controls. Epyx's game looks great too thanks to bright and colourful visuals that capture the carefree atmosphere of the Sunshine State.

**"ITS NUMBER OF EVENTS MAY BE PALTRY, BUT CALIFORNIA GAMES IS SUPERB FUN ALL THE SAME"**

## IK+ 1987

**SYSTEM 3**

Who would have thought simply adding a third fighter would create such a different fighting experience? Archer Maclean did, and when he wasn't tracing over characters from *Grease* so he could create that signature backflip move, he was coding some gritty fight mechanics, improving earlier minigames and adding all sorts of cool visual treats in the background. What a legend.

## WIZBALL 1987

**OCEAN SOFTWARE**

*Wizball* was the killer combination of Chris Yates' coding, Jon Hare's wonderfully stylistic visuals and an explosive soundtrack by Martin Galway. Charged with restoring colour to Wizworld, you must navigate each stage, shooting down enemies and using your helper, Catellite, to collect the coloured droplets of paint they leave behind. A surprisingly strategic blaster that simply oozes atmosphere.

## BUGGY BOY 1987

**ELITE SOFTWARE**

Many consider Elite's version of *Buggy Boy* to be one of the best arcade conversions on Commodore's machine. While coder Dave Thomas couldn't replicate the three-screen panoramic display of the original arcade cockpit version, he did maintain the game's sheer speed and chaotic sense of fun. He even managed to include every level from the arcade original, too. It's a great achievement.

## DEFENDER OF THE CROWN 1987

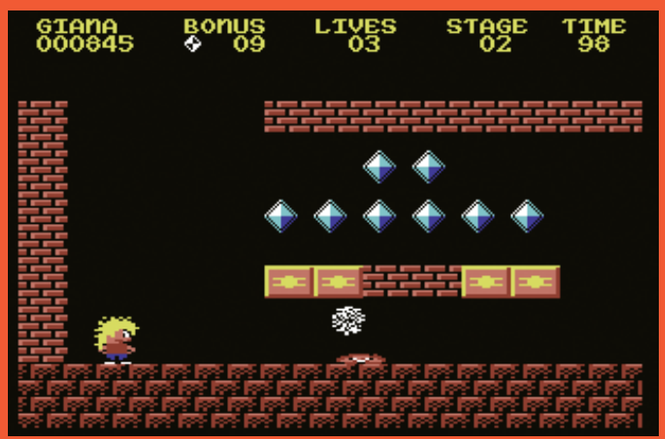
**CINEMAWARE**

Cinemaware's first release may have been designed to showcase the power of the Commodore Amiga, but the C64 version is no slouch, either. Like *Pirates!*, it offers plenty of different gameplay variations to keep you busy, but at its core is a pleasingly deep strategy game topped off by some truly exceptional presentation.

## THE GREAT GIANA SISTERS 1987

**RAINBOW ARTS**

It's not hard to see why Nintendo worked so aggressively to get *The Great Giana Sisters* off store shelves. It has enough interesting ideas of its own, but it's clearly an incredibly impressive clone of *Super Mario Bros* on the NES. Its scarcity now means it goes for good money.



## KIKSTART 2 1987

**MASTERTRONIC**

Shaun Southern's sequel greatly improves on his original 1985 offering. The speedometer and enhanced controls make it far easier to control your biker, while the 24 stages offer plenty of challenge. It's all topped off by an entertaining course editor. And to think this cost just £2…

## ALIENS 1987

**ELECTRIC DREAMS**

We've steered away from film licences, but we did want to mention this solid adaptation by Electric Dreams. It utilises a first-person viewpoint to put you in the quaking shoes of the various marines to tremendous effect.

## LAST NINJA 2 1988

**SYSTEM 3**

System 3 was a powerhouse on the C64, and the second part of its highly regarded trilogy is arguably its best game. The controls feel generally improved over the original 1987 adventure, the map design and visuals are more ambitious, and there's an atmospheric soundtrack from Matt Gray. The final game arguably ups the graphics ante, but we feel *Last Ninja 2* is a more balanced adventure.

## KATAKIS 1988

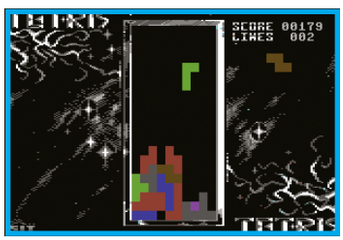
**RAINBOW ARTS**

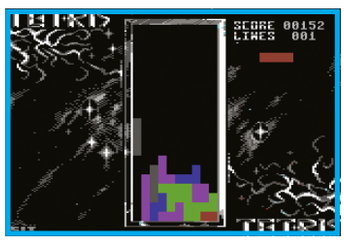
*Katakis* is such a good take on *R-Type* that Activision (the licence holder of the home ports) threatened infringement unless Factor 5 coded its Amiga port of *R-Type*. The team agreed, and Commodore owners enjoyed a game far better than the official port (which was also coded by *Katakis*' coder, Manfred Trenz).

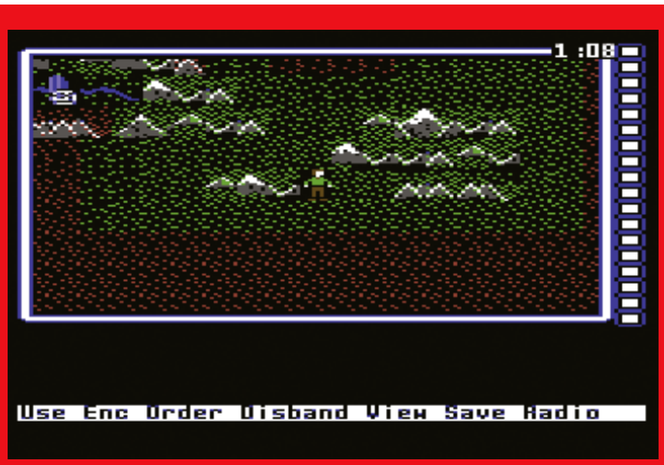
## TETRIS 1988

**MIRRORSOFT**

While Alexey Pajitnov's game isn't the prettiest-looking thing in the world, it has lost none of its infuriatingly addictive gameplay from moving across to the Commodore 64. It's also blessed by an excellent audio track by Wally Beben that nicely complements the increasingly hectic on-screen action.




## WASTELAND 1988

**ELECTRONIC ARTS**

We were torn between this and *The Bard's Tale* series (also by Interplay), but the apocalyptic RPG wins out because it still feels so fresh compared to other similar RPGs. Its game world still feels exciting to play in, while there's a large number of monsters and NPCs to interact with. Little wonder the sequel effortlessly smashed its Kickstarter in 2012.

## MICROPROSE SOCCER 1988

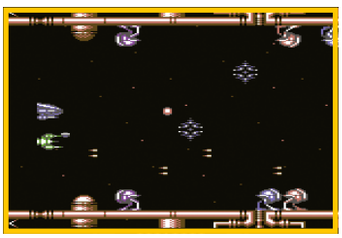
**MICROPROSE SOFTWARE**

We were torn between this and *Match Day II*, but Sensible Software's slicker game was indeed the sensible choice. Despite the association with simulator experts Microprose, this is a fast-paced arcade take on football that actually features both traditional matches and six-a-side affairs, and has plenty of tournaments to get stuck into as well. It would be later refined in the form of *Sensible Soccer*.

## ARMALYTE 1988

**THALAMUS**

The publishing arm of Newsfield Publications released some extremely popular games on the C64, but this tremendous shooter from Cyberdyne Systems is easily our favourite. There's a good range of power-ups to enjoy, the stage and wave design is challenging, but never overwhelming, while the bosses are fantastically satisfying to take down.



## TURBO OUTRUN 1989

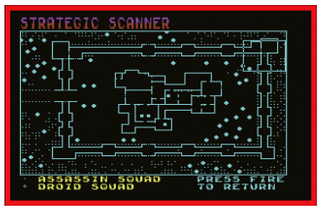
**US GOLD**

The home computer ports of *Outrun* were largely despised, but US Gold redeemed itself with its sequel by handing coding duties to Probe Software. The end result is an annoying multiload, but it's also one of the most entertaining arcade racers on the system. Steve Crow's chunky graphics look fantastic as well.

## PROJECT FIRESTART 1989

**ELECTRONIC ARTS**

This tense cinematic adventure game riffs off *Aliens* and has a neat survival horror vibe to it. While there's plenty of action, you're often outgunned, so you need to use your brains as well as your shooting skills to succeed. Checking terminals reveal a back story to your investigations, which felt revolutionary back in 1989.




## LASER SQUAD 1989

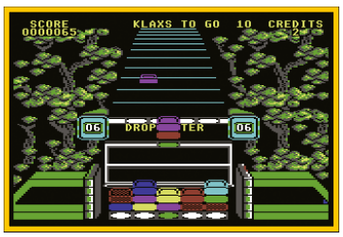
**BLADE SOFTWARE**

It may have taken an additional year to reach Commodore 64 owners, but Julian Gollop's Spectrum strategy hit was worth the wait. Successfully equipping and positioning your team is just as important as the turn-based gameplay, while the detailed missions are full of variety and powered by a slick menu-driven command system.

## KLAX 1990

**DOMARK**

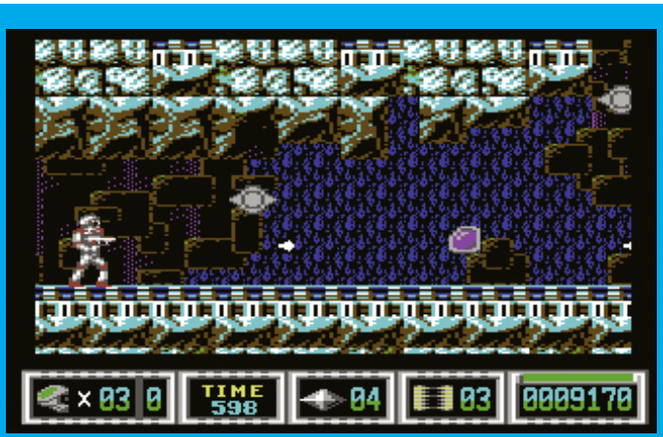
Based on the hit arcade game, *Klax* requires you to collect tiles as they fall off a moving escalator and dump them into a bucket in order to score points. It's a simple concept, but works well, and becomes very difficult to stop playing. Sadly, it lacks the arcade's enjoyable two-player mode, which is a little disappointing.



## RAINBOW ISLANDS 1990

**OCEAN SOFTWARE**

More arcade perfection, this time in the form of Graftgold's stupendous conversion of Taito's *Bubble Bobble* sequel. While all of the 8-bit home conversions are good, the C64 offering is a step above them thanks to super-smooth scrolling, great music and excellent-looking cartoon-like visuals. It's missing three islands, but remains a remarkable achievement.




## TURRICAN II: THE FINAL FIGHT 1991

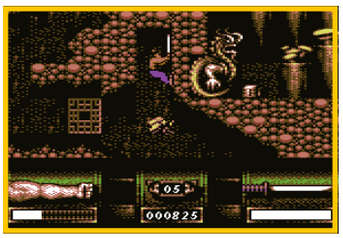
**RAINBOW ARTS**

Focus may have been moving over to the 16-bit systems by the early Nineties, but coders like Manfred Trenz were still delivering magic on the C64. *Turrican II* is a fine example, and it improves on the original in every way with better level design and beautifully designed bosses. Console versions exist in the form of a tie-in to *Universal Soldier*.

## INTERNATIONAL TENNIS 1992

**ZEPPELIN GAMES**

There's a lot of content in this budget tennis game. You can play in a single match or tournament, it's possible to pull off a surprising range of different shots, and you can play on numerous courts. The animation throughout is fantastic too, and the collision detecting is fair, allowing for some great volleys.




## FIRST SAMURAI 1992

**IMAGE WORKS**

Like many later C64 games, *First Samurai* pushed the machine to its limits, delivering amazing-looking visuals that would have been thought impossible a decade earlier. The game itself is highly entertaining, if a little difficult due to the endlessly respawning enemies. Stick with it though, as it's a sprawling adventure with plenty to discover.

## MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND 1993

**APEX COMPUTER PRODUCTIONS**

Eleven years after the Commodore 64 first launched, John and Steve Rowlands released their finest game for the aging home computer. Not only does it look incredible (you could imagine it appearing on the NES or Master System), it has the tight controls to match, delivering a rich platforming experience that puts many similar games on the C64 (or consoles for that matter) to shame.

# MORE C64 CLASSICS TO CONSIDER

- **ZAXXON** 1984 SYNAPSE SOFTWARE
- **RAID ON BUNGELING BAY** 1984 BRODERBUND
- **GUNSHIP** 1986 MICROPROSE SOFTWARE
- **SKATE OF DIE!** 1987 ELECTRONIC ARTS
- **PROJECT STEALTH FIGHTER** 1987 MICROPROSE SOFTWARE
- **ZAK MCKRACKEN AND THE ALIEN MINDBENDERS** 1988 LUCASFILM GAMES
- **POOL OF RADIANCE** 1988 STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS INC
- **NEUROMANCER** 1988 ELECTRONIC ARTS
- SPACE ROGUE 1989 ORIGIN SYSTEMS
- **STUNT CAR RACER 1989 MICROSTYLE**
- **SUPREMACY 1991 MELBOURNE HOUSE**

# Road Avenger

"I KNOW I'M GONNA REVIVE"

RETROREVIVAL

» MEGA-CD » 1992 » WOLF TEAM

**I doubt many of you will be too surprised to find out that as well as enjoying retro games, I'm interested in other things regardless of whether they're new.** Anime is definitely one example of that – say what you will about how Manga Video used to do things, but there's a certain nostalgic element to its profanity-laden English dubs and new soundtracks. That aside, changing trends mean that modern favourites like *Kaguya-sama: Love Is War* and *Odd Taxi* scratch a very different itch from classics like *Akira* and *Bubblegum Crisis*.

That's probably why I like *Road Avenger* so much. Though it arrived in the home in the early Nineties, it originated as a laserdisc game by Data East in the Eighties, much like *Time Gal* and *Cobra Command*. The footage used in the game was produced by the famed studio Toei Animation, and it has the distinctive style of that decade. I certainly didn't know it was an Eighties production as a kid reading about it in magazines though, and I still didn't know it in 2002 when I picked it up as one of the first games for my Mega-CD II. What I did know was that it looked an awful lot like an anime I'd recently seen on the Sci-Fi Channel called *Riding Bean*, and my curiosity outweighed the opinions of the people who had told me FMV games were rubbish.

The truth is that *Riding Bean* and *Road Avenger* aren't too similar – the anime is about a getaway driver who gets embroiled in a kidnapping case, whereas the game is about a man who seeks revenge on a biker gang for killing his wife. Still, those disparate setups allowed for plenty of the same kinds of fun as both of them contain cool red cars and plenty of automotive carnage, as well as wonderfully cheesy English theme songs. I did briefly wonder if *Road Avenger* had been inspired by *Riding Bean*, but it's actually the older of the two. In any case, *Road Avenger* is definitely fun while it lasts, even with the typical laserdisc shallowness factor. ✱

Gamer's HOMEBREW
Spectrum Next Special

» [Next] The highly anticipated *Melkhior's Mansion*, which is being ported to the Next by Kev Brady, is now back on and targeting a 2022 release.

» [Next] Inspired by the Game & Watch title *Mario Bros*, Sunteam's *Next Shift* imagines what might be happening on the Next production line right now.

» [Next] The cute demon Crowley is quickly becoming a mascot for the Next, and will soon appear in his very own platform adventure game.

# SPECTRUM NEXT

**Ahead of the return of our regular Homebrew section, we highlight the best games available for the Spectrum Next, and speak to the coding heroes who are developing new software for this wonderful system**

*Words By Martyn Carroll*

» [Next] An enhanced version of *The Lords Of Midnight* is included in the Next distro, alongside various other games and demos.

» [Next] *Lemmings* designer Mike Dailly has shown off the Next's capabilities with an impressive *Shadow Of The Beast* tech demo.

**It has been two years since Retro Gamer lifted the lid on the Spectrum Next, revealing the machine that the Sinclair faithful had been waiting decades for.** Back then, backers of the first Kickstarter campaign had yet to receive their Nexts, but they soon would. Now we find ourselves in a similar situation, where backers of the second Kickstarter campaign have yet to receive their Nexts. But they soon will.

The key difference now is software. Over the past two years, lots of games and applications have been released, so those people soon to receive their machines have a decent-sized library of great games to delve into. We've selected ten of what we feel are the best games, but if you visit specnext.com you'll find many more, either available right now or in-development.

Specnext's list contains some unfortunate MIAs, particularly ones planned as stretch goals during the first Kickstarter (*Rex Next*, *Nodes Of Yesod*, *No Mercy* and *Dreamworld Pogie*). These have still yet to appear and it's not clear if or when they will.

Thankfully the second Kickstarter stretch-goal games seem more realistic – and even more desirable. They include a follow-up to the brilliant *Baggers In Space*, the Next version of MSX homebrew title *Night Knight* (which our dear Jason Kelk awarded 92% in issue 196), and a 'new episode' of the 8-bit masterpiece *Head Over Heels*. Other anticipated titles include Crowley from Rusty Pixels, the on-off-now-back-on *Melkhior's Mansion* from Kev Brady, and an update of *The Way Of The Exploding Fist*. Of course, the second Kickstarter was huge,

attracting in excess of 5,000 backers, which means that more people will be compelled to produce software for this larger user base. Plus, new Next owners will also hopefully tinker and create their own games. We can't wait to cover the developments in our Homebrew section when it returns.

It is worth noting that all of the games we are covering are available for digital download, but in some cases limited physical editions are also available if you fancy building a proper collection of Next games. You can check out each title's webpage for more details.

·HOMEBREW HEROES·

# ANDY LAIRD

**The Bikers creator tells us about his high-octane Next debut**

**What prompted you to develop *Bikers*?**
I've always been fascinated by Sega's super-scaler arcade games, but sadly most of the 8-bit ports left a lot to be desired. I thought the Next might be powerful enough to do justice to a classic racing game in the style of *Hang-On*, with big sprites and a high framerate. The game was also something of a personal challenge – I've been a software developer for 25 years but have never published a game. This seemed like the perfect opportunity.

**How do you rate the Spectrum Next as a game development platform?**
It's a great platform to write for. Everything is exceptionally well thought-out and well-documented. The hardware support for sprite and tile layers almost gives the Next the ability to rival the Amiga and Mega Drive. The only real drawback is that it's ultimately still an 8-bit machine, so it's important to always bear that in mind whilst developing for it and try to play to its strengths.

**How supportive and receptive have you found the Next community?**
They've been great. During development, I posted some *Bikers* teaser trailers to the official Next Facebook group and the response was fantastic – it really helped spur me on to get the game finished. The Next team itself has also been very supportive – always answering my queries and even promoting the game without me even having to ask.

**What's does Cavern have planned next?**
I'm currently working on two new Next game projects. The first is a Gothic action platformer which has some ambitious features that haven't yet been seen in a Next game, and the second is a Japanese-inspired puzzle game. Both will hopefully be out in 2022 in both digital and physical formats. I'm also a huge fan of *Space Harrier* and it would be interesting to see what the Next could do with a game of that type. The Next is particularly strong at throwing lots of sprites around so I think it would be a good fit.

> "The hardware support for sprite and tile layers almost gives the Next the ability to rival the Amiga and Mega Drive" **ANDY LAIRD**

» [Next] *Bikers* brings the lightning-fast thrills of Sega's *Hang-On* series to the Spectrum Next.

## BIKERS

» **PUBLISHER:** CAVERN GAMES » **PRICE:** £8.95 DIGITAL
» **DEVELOPER:** ANDY LAIRD » **DOWNLOAD:** BIT.LY/3OU4NWI

***Super Hang-On* on the Spectrum was pretty good and certainly one of the better Sega coin-op conversions available.** But given the hardware, it was always a mere imprint of the turbo-charged coin-op. Now that the Spectrum hardware has been given its own boost with the arrival of the Next, Cavern Games has created a clone which is far closer to the original and on a par with the 16-bit conversions. A glance at the screenshots shows that it looks the part, with nice chunky bike sprites and a strong Sega vibe, but how does it perform? Well it's fast and it's smooth, particularly when played on 60Hz mode. The gameplay is great too, although it is undeniably difficult, with you having to anticipate corners quite early (the updated *Deluxe* version is more forgiving, but it's still no Sunday leisure drive). A decent selection of tunes accompany the racing action.

Overall, *Bikers* is one of the most technically impressive titles available for the Next. And right now it's perhaps the most important one too, as it presents an arcade game that simply wouldn't be possible on the standard Spectrum – and provides a glimpse of what we can hopefully expect further down the road.

## DELTA'S SHADOW

» **PUBLISHER:** SANCHEZ » **PRICE:** €5 DIGITAL » **DEVELOPER:** ALEXANDER UDOTOV, EVGENIY SUHOMLIN, EVGENIY ROGULIN, OLEG NIKITIN » **DOWNLOAD:** BIT.LY/3POLIUA

**When work began on this project in 2017, it was known as *Power Blade 3*.** Anyone who's played the NES *Power Blade* games from the early Nineties will therefore know what to expect, while everyone else is in for a treat. This is an action platformer par excellence and another contender for best game on the Next.

The change of title avoids potential IP issues, but the game still serves as both a tribute and unofficial successor to the earlier brace. You once again play super-soldier Nova who's battling against an evil corporation that's risen from the ashes of the Delta Foundation. You get to run, jump and slide around multiple environments, using your boomerang weapon to dispatch machines, aliens and tricky end-of-level bosses. It's brilliant fun, and there are even some 3D racing sections thrown in to punctuate the platforming. *Delta's Shadow* is also available for 128K Spectrums, but it really shines on the Next where the extended colour palette is put to such good use that it outshines the NES games on which it's based. If you're looking for a challenging and compelling game to enjoy on your Next then this should be high on your list.

> "What I'm most impressed by is the wonderful work being coded purely in BASIC"
> **MICHAEL WARE**

·HOMEBREW HEROES·

# MICHAEL 'FLASH' WARE

**We catch up with one of the members of the Rusty Pixels team**

**How would you sum up the Next to date in terms of software support?**
Software has increased steadily as people get to know the system more. There's a lot of software released and in production, and when the second Kickstarter units ship, I'm sure there will be a lot more. There is so much that the system can do and I cannot wait to see what others create. Kev Brady is currently working on his game *Ice World*, and based on what he has shown us so far, it's going to be rather stunning. What I'm most impressed by is the wonderful work being coded purely in BASIC. The Next has a much enhanced version of BASIC and coupled with its 28MHz clock speed, we are seeing games that would have been impossible back in the day.

**Have sales of current Rusty Pixels games met your expectations?**
We originally did a pre-sale to fund the physical units and it went mad! We have since sold three more physical batches of our current trio of titles – *Baggers In Space*, *Warhawk* and *Tyvarian* – and digital units still continue to sell. So, certainly based on our experiences, creating and selling games for the Next is a rewarding pastime.

**What's the latest news on *Crowley: Beginnings* and do you have a release date for it?**
Things have changed regarding the first main *Crowley* game. The original idea was a trilogy of games charting his escape from the underworld and his final reward becoming a good demon on Earth. Though *Beginnings* was started, we decided that part two of the story would be a better starting point. This game is simply called *Crowley* and it's a sprawling platform adventure with many worlds and demons to conquer. It's coming along rather well but we're not sure when it will be finished and we have no intention of rushing it. We did produce a little demo for last year's Play Expo at Blackpool and the feedback was tremendous.

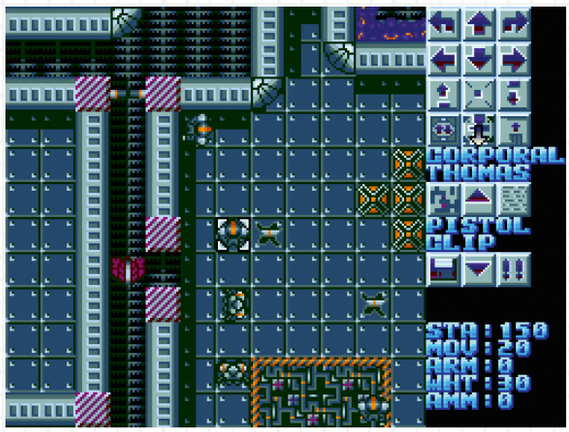
**Is the Rusty Pixels team working on any other Next releases?**
We have several things in the pipeline. We're currently putting the finishing touches to *Baggers In Space: Detour*, which is part of the second Kickstarter rewards. This is a follow-up to the original game and a new, challenging adventure. We have *Tyvarian: To The Victor The Spoils*, which adds a whole host of new ideas to the original. We're also working on *Quakestar*, which is a platform-puzzle game designed by Simon Butler, and next year we'll be releasing *Crowley World Tour 2* as a free title.

**What would you say to someone who's toying with the idea of developing a Next game?**
Go for it! The community is growing all the time and we love to see new (and old) developers join the fray.

## BAGGERS IN SPACE

» **PUBLISHER:** RUSTY PIXELS » **PRICE:** £8.49 DIGITAL » **DEVELOPER:** MICHAEL WARE, JIM BAGLEY, LOBO, SPACE FRACTAL » **DOWNLOAD:** BIT.LY/31YYZGK

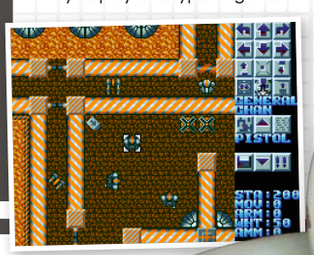
**Take three tablespoons of Ultimate's *Jetpac*, stir in two teaspoons of Activision's *HERO*, add a generous amount of sugar for sweetness and then mix thoroughly and bake until golden.** The result is *Baggers In Space*, a simple yet delicious slice of Britsoft from the Rusty Pixels kitchen. It begins with you assembling your escape rocket, à la *Jetpac*, before you venture beneath the planet's surface to find the fuel canisters you need to escape and make it home in time for tea. As gaming high-concepts go it's borderline brilliant, and the gameplay is both charming and challenging in equal measure (there are 16 planets to escape from). We can't wait to see where *Baggers* winds up next.

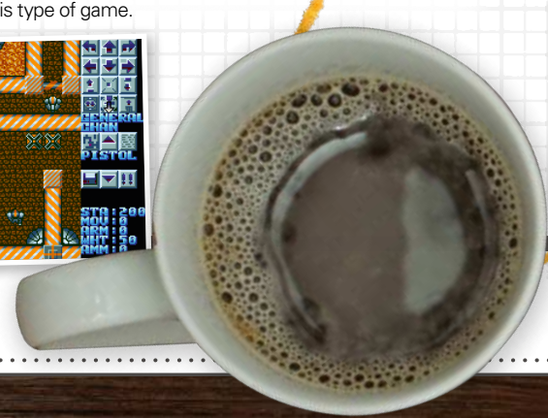


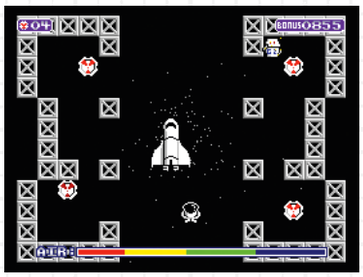

## XENO BRIGADE

» **PUBLISHER:** BITMAP SOFT » **PRICE:** £7.99 DIGITAL
» **DEVELOPER:** LES GREENHALGH » **DOWNLOAD:** BIT.LY/310QV7V

**Fans of turned-based strategy tiles like *Rebelstar* and *Laser Squad* will love this tribute, which provides a welcome change of pace to the many arcade-style games on the Next.** Leaning heavily on the movie *Aliens*, it features a bunch of marines who must outwit and outgun an army of xenos. It can be played against the computer, or two players can go head-to-head (on the proviso that one turns a blind eye while the other is plotting their moves). With three difficulty levels and six unique scenarios, *Xeno Brigade* provides a solid challenge and decent longevity. And the best bit – it features mouse support, which is clearly the best way to play this type of game.



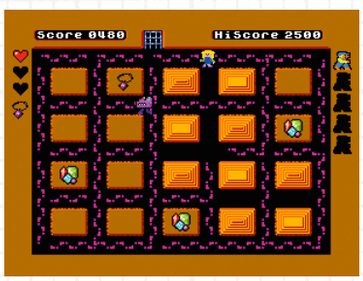




# GALAXY OF ERROR

» **PUBLISHER:** STEVE MONKS
» **PRICE:** FREE » **DEVELOPER:** STEVE MONKS
» **DOWNLOAD:** BIT.LY/30SAS19

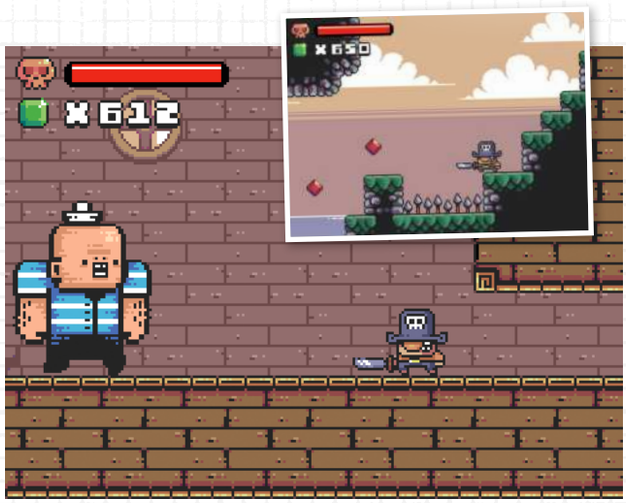
**There is plenty of free software available for the Next, and the quality is generally uneven as you might imagine.** But *Galaxy Of Error* is an excellent free game that we'd happily pay for. It's basically an arcade-style puzzler where you have to guide Spaceman Dan to his escape shuttle before his limited air supply runs out. The catch is that he can only travel in straight lines, and only stops when he hits something. So it's about using the environment (and genial space droids) to plot your path around each of the 30 stages. We've probably done the game a disservice in trying to explain it, so just download it (for free!) and enjoy one of the most generous games on the Next.




# GO MUMMY!

» **PUBLISHER:** REMY SHARP » **PRICE:** NAME YOUR OWN » **DEVELOPER:** REMY SHARP, REMY'S KIDS, RICHARD FAULKNER » **DOWNLOAD:** BIT.LY/3PXCAUL

**You won't be shocked to hear that this is a remake of *Oh Mummy,* that old stalwart from the early days of the Amstrad CPC.** As clones go it's admirably close, and its maze gameplay is as snug as old slippers. What might surprise you is that the game was written entirely in NextBASIC, the extended language that comes with the Next. What's more, the author has included fully-commented source code with the release, so anyone looking to dabble in programming for the Next can see how it's done.




# TREASURE HUNTERS

» **PUBLISHER:** SANCHEZ SOFT » **PRICE:** €5 DIGITAL » **DEVELOPER:** ALEXANDER UDOTOV, OLEG NIKITIN, PIXEL FROG » **DOWNLOAD:** BIT.LY/31XEU5Y

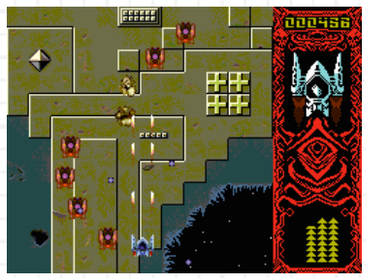
**Another impressive creation from Sanchez and friends, only this one swaps the gloomy tech noir of *Delta's Shadow* for a bright and breezy pirate romp.** The story centres on Captain Clown Nose, a brainless buccaneer who has managed to scatter the contents of a treasure chest all over an uncharted island. You have to help him gather up the booty while contending with the island's unimpressed inhabitants – including a bunch of ugly bosses. Technically this is a cut above most Next games, features full-screen scrolling and some neat parallax effects. But this is no tech demo; there's a great platformer here that would have been well-received on the ST and Amiga back in the day.

built into it.
Exits: S, D
You see a strange mechanism.
>examine mechanism
There is a small, square hole at one side and a series of interlocking circular discs, although one seems to be missing.
>

# RITE OF THE DRUID

» **PUBLISHER:** SUNTEAM » **PRICE:** NAME YOUR OWN
» **DEVELOPER:** SUNTEAM » **DOWNLOAD:** BIT.LY/3LGE2ME

**Ladies and gentlemen, here we have an award winner.** *Rite Of The Druid* was awarded first place in The Next Adventure Jam 2020, a competition that recognised the best works of interactive fiction developed using the Adventuron authoring tool. In the game you play a druid who has to explore a mysterious land in search of a special rune. It's a fairly short adventure, featuring just 25 locations, and the puzzles are elementary Watson, but what elevates it above the competition are the wonderful visuals that depict each scene. These bring the quest to life and imbue it with a tangible sense of atmosphere. It's already clear that the Next will offer a good home to text adventures.



# WARHAWK

» **PUBLISHER:** RUSTY PIXELS » **PRICE:** £8.49 DIGITAL » **DEVELOPER:** MICHAEL WARE, JIM BAGLEY, LOBO, SPACE FRACTAL » **DOWNLOAD:** BIT.LY/3Y10EDE

**This is how you update a game for the Next.** Michael 'Flash' Ware originally wrote Warhawk for the Commodore 64 in 1986, and he resurrected his scrolling shooter more than three decades later to coincide with the arrival of the cased Next. As per usual, there are 20 alien-infested stages standing between you and the fate of the galaxy. It looks great, plays even better and, like all the best shooters, it's absolutely relentless, with the enemies ranging from tiny tiddlers to vast mother ships that guard the end of each stage. A demo of the game is included in the Next distro, and playing it will confirm what you already know: this game needs to be in your collection.

# MONTANA MIKE

» **PUBLISHER:** SOFTWARE AMUSEMENTS
» **PRICE:** FREE » **DEVELOPER:** ADRIAN CUMMINGS
» **DOWNLOAD:** BIT.LY/3XVKHFO

**Following in the death-defying footsteps of Pitfall Harry and Rick Dangerous, Montana Mike must explore long-lost caverns and tombs in search of ancient artefacts.** Filled with platforming peril and good humour, this is an excellent little game which is only slightly let down by the graphics which use a dithering effect. This was originally a paid-for release, but the author has since moved on from Next development and it's now available as a free download, along with several other Next releases. And you can't argue with that.

# THE MAKING OF GRAVITY

**ROSS GOODLEY'S GRAVITY TOOK PRINCIPLES FROM EINSTEIN'S GENERAL THEORY OF RELATIVITY, ADDED A RAMPANT ALIEN INVASION FLEET AND BASED THE ENTIRE CONCEPT AROUND GRAVITY, BLACK HOLE SINGULARITIES AND INTERSTELLAR TRAVEL, ALL PRESENTED ON A 3D GRID REPRESENTING THE MINKOWSKI SPACETIME CONCEPT**

**WORDS BY RICHARD HEWISON**



## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**BOMBUZAL**
**SYSTEM:** ATARI ST, AMIGA
**YEAR:** 1988

**LIBERATION: CAPTIVE 2 (PICTURED)**
**SYSTEM:** AMIGA, CD32
**YEAR:** 1993

**G-SURFERS**
**SYSTEM:** PS2
**YEAR:** 2002

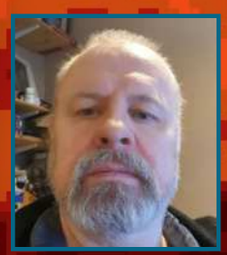
**Having recently completed the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga conversions of *Bombuzal* for his good friend and fellow games programmer Tony Crowther, Ross Goodley quickly turned attention towards his next game.** This time though, his ambitious ideas proved difficult to conceptualise.

"My inspirations were quite complex," admits Ross. "I'd been playing around with unusual playfields for a while. A couple of years before, I'd come up with a *Defender*-esque side-scrolling shooter which played out on a Möbius strip, so as you scrolled, what was on the bottom of the playfield appeared on the top, and vice versa."

The game that Ross had produced, again with Tony Crowther, was *Challenge Of The Gobots On The Moebius Strip*, published by Reaktör Software in 1987 for the Commodore 64. A Möbius strip is symbolic of the concept of infinity, and a metaphor for the universe being never-ending and continuously expanding.

"As a result of that game, I'd become intrigued by the rubber sheet model of gravity, or Minkowski Spacetime, and thought I could produce something that looked a bit like *Populous*, but was more dynamic, to depict the infamous rubber sheet model," reveals Ross. "I initially thought that *Asteroids*, displayed in that view but with the extra dimension of gravitational attraction, might be fun."

As his ideas evolved, the game gradually shifted away from an intriguing take on a classic late-Seventies arcade shooter and morphed into a much more strategic affair. "The strategic part of the game was heavily inspired by the novel *The Forever War* by Joe Haldeman," says Ross. "It was from there that I shamelessly cribbed the use of ▶



» Ross Goodley was the creator of *Gravity* and worked on the ambitious game alongside Pete Lyon.

## IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** IMAGE WORKS
- **» DEVELOPER:** ROSS GOODLEY, PETE LYON
- **» RELEASED:** 1990
- **» PLATFORM:** ATARI ST, AMIGA
- **» GENRE:** STRATEGY

» [Atari ST] The player's craft started in the same system as the other UNSS craft, before heading out on their first mission.



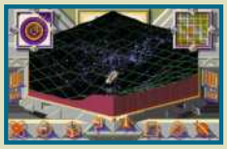
» [Atari ST] The Orion Drive detonated bombs behind the player's craft, propelling it forwards. Quicker detonations meant faster momentum through space.

"THE STRATEGIC PART OF THE GAME WAS INSPIRED BY THE NOVEL THE FOREVER WAR BY JOE HALDEMAN"

**ROSS GOODLEY**

# HOW TO WIN THE BATTLE AGAINST GRAVITY

### FIRST ORDERS



■ Beginners should set a 99% activity level for StarCom, then fly their UNSS Hawking spacecraft and look for the local gravity well on their long-range radar to find the local black hole. Steer and thrust the craft straight into the black hole to emerge at the pre-programmed mission destination.

### SIGNIFICANT COLOURS

■ The long-range radar displays paths to gravity sources. Green indicates planets, blue leads to the singularity, while grey leads to a star. The 3D grid turns brown when close to a rocky world, cyan for a Terran planet, magenta for a gas giant and other colours for the different star types.

### COLONISING MISSIONS

■ Start looking for a planet to colonise. Bring up the ship's Tools module and have a Colony module ready for when you encounter the planet. Once in close orbit, launch the module and wait to be informed if a colony has been established. Once confirmed, StarCom will issue fresh orders.

» [Atari ST] Rocky worlds could be terraformed with the launch of a well-placed Genesis device.

» [Atari ST] If they wanted to, the player could switch to a solid Minkowski Spacetime grid to unclutter the display.

▶ black hole singularities for FTL travel and the weird time-dilation effects of travelling close to the speed of light and close to the gravity well of a black hole."

Anyone who has seen Christopher Nolan's 2014 movie *Interstellar* will be familiar with the concept of time dilation. It is also pivotal in Joe Haldeman's book, where a tour of duty fighting the Taurans meant centuries had passed by back on Earth. In Ross' game, the main display showed time whizzing by, with a day back on Earth lasting mere seconds of game time in the depths of outer space.

Persuading a publisher to take on this unique and quite cerebral idea was surely a tricky proposition, especially without anything committed to paper? "There never was a complete design document, but I knew what I was trying to do," explains Ross. "I also knew that it was hopelessly ambitious, but because it was my vision, I could be flexible if things needed to change."

Mirrorsoft's head of games John Cook and project manager Dean Lester travelled up to Sheffield and met Ross at his house to discuss the project. John takes up the story, recalling the meeting. "Ross had an early technical demo, but he would have needed a lot of guidance and support to get the game finished. I thought we could provide that, and it wasn't an expensive project compared to some, so we took it on."

"We had quite extensive discussions about what I was intending to produce before I got started," adds Ross. "The demo I had was just the bare bones of the 'sheet', even before I'd sorted out the clipping and the front wall I used later. It may well have had a few sprites running on it, but I'm not sure, and given my near total lack of artistic ability, it would have been a leap of faith to make much out of it! Thankfully, I guess I was lucky that Imageworks just let me get on with it. They were happier, perhaps more innocent, days."

**The title of Ross' new game was *Gravity*, a personal nod to another classic science-fiction novel, *Mission Of Gravity* by Hal Clement.** "Although that book wasn't related to the plot of the game in any way," says Ross. It was an apt title, considering the influences that gravity had on the game.

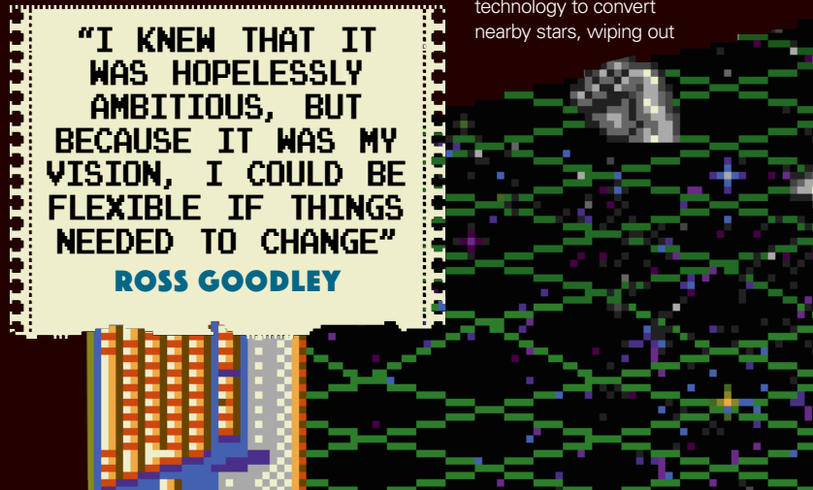
John and Dean paired Ross with prolific graphic artist Pete Lyon, whose computer art resembled traditional brushstrokes, even more impressive when he only had 16 or 32 colours at his disposal. "I remember being driven up to Leeds by Dean to meet with Pete fairly early in the process," Ross says. "After that, most of our interaction was over the phone and floppies posted in the mail."

The art Pete provided to Ross for *Gravity* was predominantly sci-fi hardware, ships, planets, suns, control panels and depictions of outer space, along with the rather ominous loading screen. As for the programming, *Gravity* was developed simultaneously for the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga using an RS232 serial network that Ross created specifically for the job. His code was written, compiled and assembled on the ST and sent down the RS232 cable to the Amiga, with Ross using macro switches to handle the technical differences between the two platforms.

Ross began by expanding on the technical demo he had shown to Mirrorsoft, as he explains. "I finished off the 3D grid first. That was always at the heart of the game, and was the focus early on. After that I worked on the holocube star map, then the drones and their programming language."

*Gravity* was set in the year 2321AD, and mankind had begun colonising the universe, soon encountering the Outies, an alien race who desired the energy found within black holes. If they could not find a black hole, they had the technology to convert nearby stars, wiping out

> "I KNEW THAT IT WAS HOPELESSLY AMBITIOUS, BUT BECAUSE IT WAS MY VISION, I COULD BE FLEXIBLE IF THINGS NEEDED TO CHANGE"
> **ROSS GOODLEY**



## LEARN HOW TO DEFEAT THE INVADING OUTIES

### RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

■ When encountering Outie ships, rotate your craft and fire on them, or launch a drone and let it take care of them. Try your best to avoid galactic phenomena, including VarSings; variable singularities that pop into existence, crushing anything close by, before disappearing again.

### DRIVE PROPULSION

■ If fuel is running low for the Ion Drive, search for a gas giant. A close flyby will refuel your craft. If you run out entirely, switch to the Orion Drive. If both drives are destroyed in battle, you only have Solar Sails left, which struggle to move you anywhere.

### DON'T WASTE TIME

■ Gravitational time dilation means you cannot afford to delay your actions, especially when near gravity wells. As soon as your orders have been received, prepare your tools and head out of the system. The real-time clock shows you how fast time is speeding by.

any local planets along the way. It was the player's job to eradicate the entire Outie fleet, achieved by colonising planets, developing technology and tracing the Outies back to their home base and wiping them out for good. Meanwhile, if the Outies found the location of the player's strategic HQ, called StarCom, then a successful attack would be game over for the player, and for mankind.

**The player began by controlling the United Nations Scout Ship Hawking, one of 16 craft that comprised mankind's space fleet, each named after a famous scientist, physicist or astronomer including Einstein, Herschel, Newton, Rosen and Minkowski as well as astronauts Sally Ride, Yuri Gagarin and Valentina Tereshkova.** The UNSS Magellan was named after the NASA spacecraft, launched in May 1989 to map the surface of Venus and measure the planet's gravitational field.

Played out in a 3D-esque environment, *Gravity* was a mixture of an arcade shooter, with heavy doses of strategy. Aesthetically, a 3D grid showed the gravitational effects of stars or planets in the vicinity of the player's spacecraft. Superficially, it looked as if the craft was gliding along the surface of the grid, following its varying contours. However, without counter thrust from the engines, the player's craft would slide down into the deeper gravitational wells, created by the mass of nearby stars, planets, or other astronomical phenomena, including black holes.

The proximity of competing sources of gravity would pull the player's craft in different directions as they travelled across each star system. Once the player had thrust away from one gravity source, another would start tugging on the craft's trajectory.

The short and long-range radars shown on the HUD displayed the different gravitational influences in the current system, with stars, planets and black holes having the largest impact. Travelling between star systems was achieved using black holes, so knowing how to locate one was vital. Of course, the invading Outies also traversed each system using the same method, so black holes became hives of activity as the game progressed.

During the game, the player could change their flagship's propulsion, switching from the default Ion Drive to the Orion Drive, which detonated small fission bombs 440 times per second behind a specially created shield to thrust the ship forwards. That propulsion system was inspired by a real-life study conducted in the Fifties/Sixties to devise a method of space travel. Project Orion was eventually abandoned after nuclear explosions in space were unsurprisingly deemed unsafe, but Ross decided to include a nod to it in *Gravity*. If both drive systems were destroyed in battle, then solar light sails become the craft's only other option.

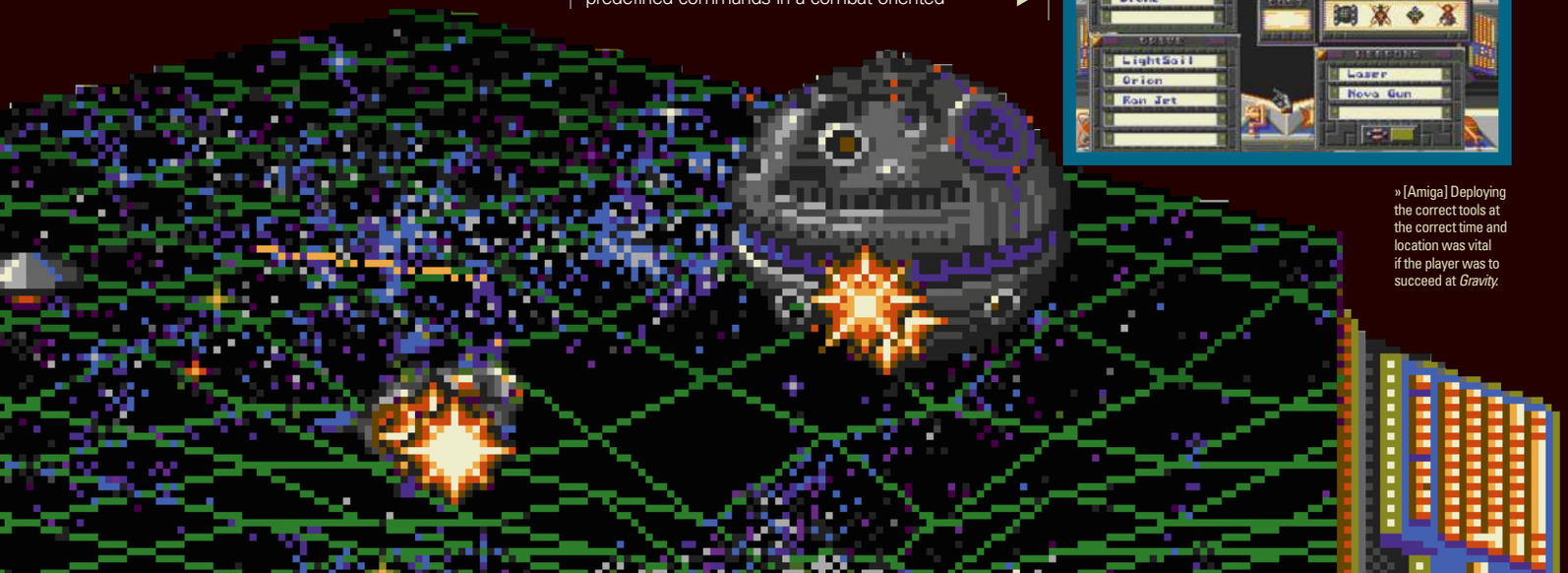
Each craft also had several weaponry slots, starting with a Nova gun and a missile. The Nova gun was another facet of the game based upon a real scientific theory, in this case using Stephen Hawking's Grand Unification Of Forces.

Aside from controlling their craft, the player was also able to program individual drones to patrol systems independently, using a series of 14 predefined commands in a combat-oriented ▶

» [Atari ST] If the player was unprepared, the final conquest of the Outies could turn out to be a massacre for mankind.

» [Amiga] Constructing orders to the fleet was a simple exercise of clicking on the relevant commands.

» [Amiga] Deploying the correct tools at the correct time and location was vital if the player was to succeed at *Gravity*.



# NAME-DROPPING SEQUEL

**WHAT WAS THE INTENDED SEQUEL, DROP SOLDIER, ALL ABOUT?**

## SHARED UNIVERSE

■ *Drop Soldier* was set in the same universe as *Gravity*, continuing the war against the invading Outies. This time, it was viewed from an in-helmet perspective. The player was to command a troop of soldiers hand-picked on a mission-by-mission basis, with each having a different set of skills, and equipment.

## FRACTAL LANDSCAPES

■ Early versions on the Atari ST ran a pre-emptive, prioritised threading system which generated a fractal landscape that would never repeat. It included palm-like trees and buildings to enter and walk around. A graduated sky completed the illusion, using a timer interrupt that changed the background colour that formed it.

## MULTIPLE SCREENS

■ The main display would have been several screens wide, with the central screen being the visor view. Scrolling left or right would have revealed other instruments, including equipment and weapons to fit the current soldier's abilities. Choosing the right personnel and equipment was vital if the player was to succeed.

## MORE FROM PETE

■ Pete Lyon was once again creating the graphics for *Drop Soldier*, and he had already completed most of the work required before publisher Mirrorsoft went into administration in late-1991 and the game never recovered. Pete created art for 32 different soldiers in total, each one distinct from the next.

## AMIGA VS ST

■ *Drop Soldier* was also going to feature null-modem link play, so Amiga-to-Amiga, ST-to-ST or Amiga-to-ST could play together by connecting a cable to the port on the back of each computer. Although the icons were completed for the functionality, the required in-game coding was not.

▶ programming language. Each drone had a basic weapon and propulsion system and could deal with small Outie incursions or at least buy the player some time to escape when needed.

If the player's craft was destroyed, then the game designated a different UNSS craft to be the flagship, and the player took control of that instead, until there were none left. At that point, mankind was doomed and the Outies took control.

**At the heart of everything was StarCom, which generated the orders during play, deciding which systems to colonise or defend from the invading Outies.** The player could change how much involvement StarCom had. If set to 99%, StarCom made all those decisions, leaving the player to simply follow orders. Set StarCom to 0% and the player was in total command. The game started with StarCom set to 50%, and it would immediately issue the player with their first set of orders.

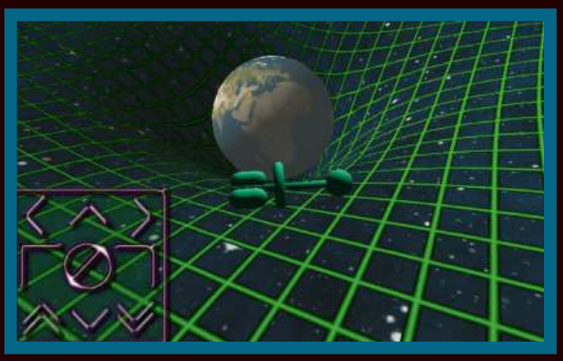
The invading Outies were completely computer controlled, using AI routines. The tactical AI for the Outies used the same combat-oriented language that player drones followed, allowing Ross to develop the two systems in tandem. "At first, the strategic portion of the enemy AI used the same method of sending probes as the player but given that the AI was a bit thick as time went on, I used to drop it hints, including the location of player-controlled systems, so that rather sooner than it might otherwise have done, it would find StarCom and come boiling out of the local singularity like hornets from a nest!"

Whilst progress was being made on the game by Ross, changes at Mirrorsoft meant that between the game being commissioned, developed and published, different personnel saw it over the finishing line. The original project manager, Dean Lester, left to join developer and fellow publisher Teque in its new London office, and so recent recruit Graeme Boxall was handed the job soon after joining the publisher from recently defunct Telecomsoft.

In a classic case of good news, bad news, the scheduled release for *Gravity* was put back by Mirrorsoft, meaning that Ross had more time

> "ALL THIS REMINISCING HAS INSPIRED ME TO DUST OFF A TECH DEMO OF GRAVITY II THAT I STARTED PLAYING WITH A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO"
>
> **ROSS GOODLEY**

» [Amiga] Various systems on the player's craft could be taken out by a well-aimed salvo from the Outies.



» [Android] Ross has started tinkering with development on a possible second *Gravity* game, running on PC and Android.

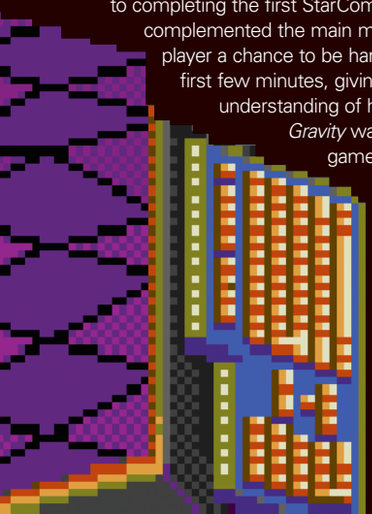
to fine-tune the game than originally anticipated. Unfortunately, that meant the final few payment milestones, including the one due on publication, were also kicked further down the road, giving Ross a financial headache to contend with. "That was the first time I really saw the industry as a business," recalls Graeme. "I told Ross that he had more time, but he was unhappy as he couldn't extend the schedule and had no money!"

Upon release in early 1990, *Gravity* received mixed reviews, with some awarding it accolades and claiming it was the next *Elite* to others unable to fathom what to do. The game was complex, heavily influenced by accepted scientific theories, and whilst the game's PR specifically mentioned that "… truly original programs become increasingly rare, therefore Imageworks are pleased to announce that they are to publish such a program", in truth they struggled to give the game the marketing it needed or deserved.

"The game had so much potential but was probably too much for one man. It was definitely not given enough testing time. It was just too big. On top of that there was the programming language which was impossibly hard for some people to understand," admits Graeme.

**Former Newsfield journalist Gary Penn was commissioned to write the manual for *Gravity*, and it was not a straight-forward task, as he recalls.** "I was writing manuals for most of the major publishers around that time and had an ongoing relationship with Mirrorsoft. About the only thing I recall about writing that manual is that it was hard and very time consuming!"

In hindsight, *Gravity* was a bit too tough from the start. The player's first orders appear literally seconds after entering the game and the information needed to cope with those opening salvos was scattered throughout the manual. A quickstart guide to completing the first StarCom order would have complemented the main manual and given the player a chance to be hand-held through the first few minutes, giving them a quicker understanding of how the game worked.



*Gravity* was an absorbing game that stretched the capabilities of the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga. Colonising worlds, defeating Outies and searching for their home world was a worthwhile challenge if you put in the effort, and the extrapolation from real science gave the game an authentic feel. Just the following year, the entire game was given away with the June 1991 issue of *Commodore User* magazine, with scant instructions that would have made the game even harder to grasp.

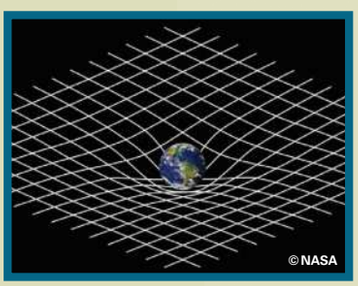
Despite all that, Mirrorsoft knew *Gravity* was a quality title, and so Ross and Image Works collaborated again on a follow-up, called *Drop Soldier*. Unfortunately, development was only a third completed when Mirrorsoft went into administration, following the death of Robert Maxwell, and *Drop Soldier* just disappeared.

Over 30 years have now passed since *Gravity* was published by Mirrorsoft on the Image Works label, so what does Ross think of his creation now, looking back? "I'll never be entirely satisfied with anything that I've done, but I did think I'd got adequately close to my original idea, and once you knew what you were doing, I thought it played pretty well. If I was writing it today, obvious improvements would be a proper, full 3D implementation of the grid, proper gravity using fourth order Runge-Kutta integration methods, as my original attempt was a huge kludge, and improved AI, as I would want to avoid the cheats I had to use!"

Ross has one more comment to make, and it is a tantalising revelation for fans of the original game. "All this reminiscing has inspired me to dust off a tech demo of *Gravity II* that I started playing with a couple of years ago," he admits. PC and Android versions were being considered, so another outing against the Outies could yet be on the event horizon… watch this space! ✱

## THE THEORY OF GRAVITY

### EXAMINING THE MINKOWSKI SPACETIME CONCEPT




■ The single most important inspiration for *Gravity* was the concept of Minkowski Spacetime. Hermann Minkowski was a German mathematician who contributed to mathematical theories, mathematical physics and the theory of relativity. He was a prominent European university lecturer and was one of Albert Einstein's teachers. Minkowski Spacetime is a mathematical concept involving the three dimensions we are familiar with, plus the addition of time as the fourth.

The infamous rubber sheet model is commonly used to explain the concept in layman's terms. Imagine holding out a flat rubber sheet, then placing a heavy ball in the centre. The sheet is affected by the mass of the ball and the rubber stretches and curves as a result. If a smaller mass comes close to the curvature, then the path of that mass is affected. The indent and curvature of the sheet represents a gravitational field, and the model helps explain that the mass of an object distorts spacetime and drags a smaller object toward it as a result.

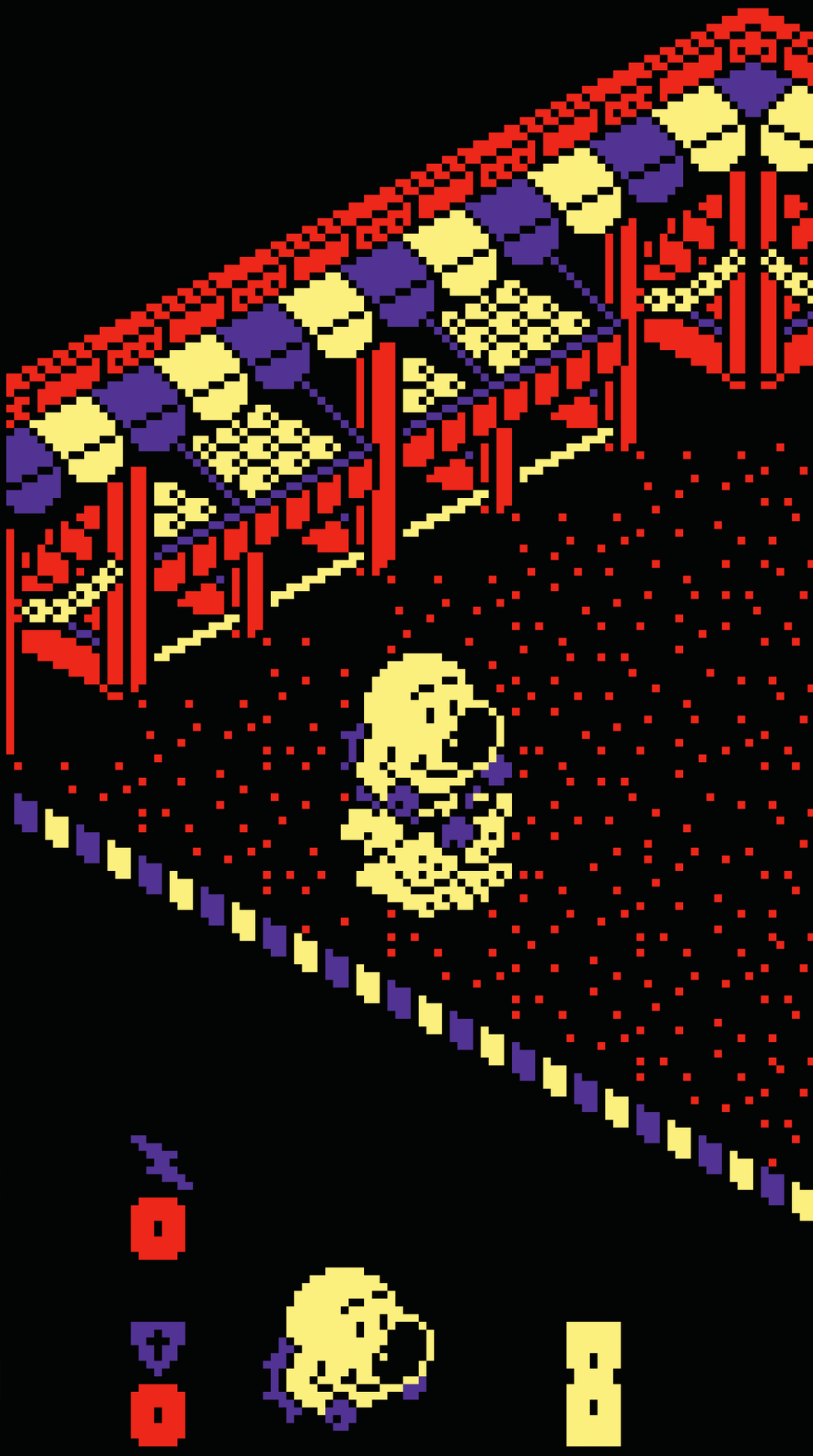
However, physicists agree that the analogy is flawed because it attempts to describe a four-dimensional concept in just two dimensions. In actuality, the resulting gravitational field surrounds the object 360 and when introducing a second mass, the model is misleading regarding how that mass behaves around the gravitational well. The model is also unable to depict how important time is in the concept. One thing is for sure though; playing *Gravity* is far easier than fully comprehending the scientific theories that influenced it.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

# Head Over Heels

» **PLATFORM:** AMSTRAD CPC » **RELEASED:** 1987 » **DEVELOPER:** JON RITMAN, BERNIE DRUMMOND AND GUY STEVENS

**987 was a pivotal year for the 8-bit computers.** Throughout these 12 months, originality still flourished on the Spectrum, Amstrad and Commodore 64 despite the inevitable creep of releases licensed from arcade machines and movies. *Head Over Heels* is steeped in inventiveness, not least the innovative way in which each character has certain qualities that are manipulated in order to progress. However, operating Head and Heels separately will only get you so far; eventually the puzzles take on such a devious design that only the two creatures combined can solve them. Frustratingly separated by a just-too-high wall early on in the game, the pair escape and descend independently to the marketplace below the grim prison of the emperor Blacktooth. To the quirky strains of *How Much Is That Doggie In The Window*, Heels scampers past stalls of fruit and vegetables until he comes face to face with his lifelong chum. One more swift jump and Head is safely installed on Heels and their adventure against the evil Blacktooth empire can continue – together. *

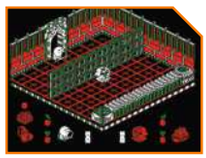


## BIO

Having honed their isometric skills on *Head Over Heels'* progenitor, *Batman*, Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond (who sadly recently passed away) collaborated a year later to create what many regard as the absolute pinnacle of the genre. Starring two cute characters, the eponymous Head and Heels, the game's unique selling point is the extremely clever way that each character negotiates its way around the world, with a combination of the two required to solve many more screens. With its incredibly offbeat graphics – who can forget the Prince Charles Dalek, fashioned originally as *The Bash Street Kids*' Plug – and complex, labyrinthine map, *Head Over Heels* quickly became a standard bearer for the isometric arcade adventure.

# MORE CLASSIC HEAD OVER HEELS MOMENTS

## So Close



At the beginning of the game, Head and Heels are tantalisingly disconnected with just this slim wall between them. Even with Head's superior jump, the wall can't be scaled, although persistent fans found a way. Through careful positioning of Heels and frantic jumping by Head, the pair can be combined at this early stage, saving a lot of work for Head.

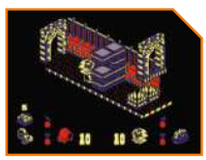
## By Royal Decree

Famously reinvented from its original design as Plug from *The Bash Street Kids*, Jon and Bernie reasoned that telling journalists it was a Prince Charles Dalek would engender more interest. It did, and it's also one of the trickiest early puzzles in *Head Over Heels*. Manipulate the royal auricles using the bumper and jump over him in order to grab that vital piece of equipment, the purse.

## Thanks For The Memories

One of Bernie Drummond's favourite graphics, the reincarnation fish is an ornate and strange creature that instantly memorises everything about your game once eaten. Lose a life and Head, Heels or both are transported back to the location where you ate the fish. Essentially a checkpoint, it's nonetheless another fine example of the fantastic imagination behind *Head Over Heels*.

## Teamwork Makes The Dream Work



Even once united, Head and Heels must still continually work at solving the game's nefarious screens. Often, they'll need to separate once more in order to fit through tight gaps. Here, there's a reversal of roles as Heels stands on Head in order to slot through the hole. With his superior jump, Head can then follow through on his own.

# THE MAKING OF GREMLIN'S TOP GEAR GAMES

## IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** KEMCO
- **DEVELOPER:** GREMLIN GRAPHICS SOFTWARE
- **RELEASED:** 1992 TO 1995
- **PLATFORM:** SNES (TOP GEAR 2), SNES, MEGA DRIVE, AMIGA
- **GENRE:** RACING

**Inspired by Out Run, influenced by Lotus and with no thought given to upsetting the BBC, Top Gear pulled up on the SNES in 1992 and heralded the start of an acclaimed series of racing games for publisher KEMCO. Here we look at how Gremlin Graphics got things moving**

**WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES**

## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO CHALLENGE**
**SYSTEM:** AMIGA, VARIOUS
**YEAR:** 1990

**NIGEL MANSELL'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP RACING (PICTURED)**
**SYSTEM:** AMIGA, VARIOUS
**YEAR:** 1993

**NEWMAN/HAAS INDYCAR FEATURING NIGEL MANSELL**
**SYSTEM:** MEGA DRIVE, SNES
**YEAR:** 1994

» [SNES] Track design was an iterative process driven by playtesting, according to Ritchie Brannan.

**Mention *Top Gear* to most people and they'll be inclined to think about the BBC's motoring show.** Not us! We still fondly remember a very different *Top Gear* – a series of arcade racers that debuted in 1992 on the SNES.

Totally unrelated to the TV programme, it was yet another racing game from Gremlin Graphics, released in the wake of the software house's *Lotus* titles that had amazed Amiga and Atari ST owners. *Lotus*' success caught the attention of Japanese videogame publisher KEMCO which led to a deal. "The company was interested in our *Lotus* game but it didn't want the Lotus branding," recalls Gremlin co-founder Ian Stewart. Instead, Gremlin designed a new racing game earmarked for the SNES and *Top Gear* became a natural evolution of what had gone before.

As one of the original Nintendo licensees, debuting with *Dough Boy* in 1985 on the NES, KEMCO was an attractive partner, thanks to its strong relationship with the Japanese console giant. The company was particularly enamoured by *Lotus*' two-player mode. "It had been successful," recalls Ian. "We also knew how to develop a game of this type and make it work well and the idea was that KEMCO would publish our new game in the US and Japan."

The proposed deal was good business. "KEMCO allowed us access to the official SNES dev kits," says programmer Ritchie Brannan. It also meant that Gremlin could take its racing games to 16-bit consoles without having to splash the cash. "I can't remember the details around the financials but KEMCO would have covered the developer costs," Ian recalls.

Ritchie was among the first to be assigned to the *Top Gear* team, with fellow coders Ashley Bennett and Simon Blake joining a little while later. Paul Gregory was tasked with creating the graphics while the audio was handed to musician Barry Leitch. "The audio engine was produced by Hiroyuki Masuno at KEMCO," Ritchie recalls.

At the time, the SNES wasn't blessed with lots of racers. "We were aware there were very few successful racing games for the SNES but several successful ones on the NES," Ritchie says. "The only real consideration we had was that this was going to be a worldwide release and we wanted to appeal to a worldwide audience. It influenced our choice of racing locations."

> **"WE WERE INFLUENCED BY THE USE OF NITROUS OXIDE IN THE DUKES OF HAZZARD"**
> **RITCHIE BRANNAN**

The team chose tracks in countries across the world from the USA, Brazil, Japan and Germany to Scandinavia, France, Italy and the United Kingdom – the game's main markets. Landmark locations such as New York, Munich, Stockholm and Paris were included along with Gremlin's home city, Sheffield.

More importantly, Gremlin wanted the game to be fast-moving and smooth with a two-player split-screen. The team also decided that there would be no checkpoint chasing or time limits. "Checkpoints and time limits were just not a part of the game we wanted to make," Ritchie explains. The single-player game would be enjoyed on a split-screen too. "There was also some discussion about having a non-split-screen single-player but ultimately this was decided against," Ritchie continues. "On the technical side, the underlying character set used for the road would become too blocky when extended over a larger screen area, so this would have needed changes to the assets which would have needed more time, as would re-working the code controlling it.

"The assets would have also needed more cartridge memory which would have increased the manufacturing costs. Since *Top Gear* was still an unknown quantity, this was a risk too far.

[SNES] *Top Gear* players could choose from one of four different control methods.

# THE LOTUS CONNECTION

## THE TOP GEAR SERIES LOOKED AND SOUNDED FAMILIAR…

■ It is inevitable that comparisons will be drawn between Gremlin's *Lotus* and *Top Gear* series. After all, the graphics are strikingly similar: there are chunky cars viewed from behind which drive down a horizontally-striped track that is flanked either side by red and white stripes. There is also the same split-screen two-player view.

Yet Ritchie Brannan and Ashley Bennett say they didn't necessarily take their main cues from the *Lotus* franchise. "There may have been some influence but *Out Run* was really the main inspiration," Ritchie affirms, with Ashley adding, "We didn't actively copy anything other than the things we probably thought were obvious. A lot of how it looked was because that was the only way you could do it."

Even so, Ritchie says the artists had worked with people who had created the assets for *Lotus* ("they may have reworked some of the assets"). What's more, Shaun Southern, who created *Lotus*, also spent some time working in Ritchie's office at Gremlin. "So there was probably some more influence there. Overall, though, the teams and vision were different."

The strongest connection was the choice of music in the first *Top Gear* which included superb remixed tracks from the *Lotus* series. "The *Top Gear* audio was done in five days when I was down at Gremlin," says the game's composer Barry Leitch. "It took about a day-and-a-half to work out how the dev kit worked and to write the Vegas piece.

"After that, in order to go home at the weekend, I started rearranging pieces from the first two *Lotus* games. For the SNES, I had to program the music I'd written in a soundtracker on the Amiga into data statements. There were commands to change note lengths, instruments and note values trying to use as little memory as possible. I was trying to make it sound like there were more than four notes playing at a time."

» [SNES] Both *Top Gear* and *Top Gear 2* were manufactured with the incorrect ROM image including multiple bugs that had been fixed. A sharp hill at the end of some tracks was among the bugs.

» [SNES] Track locations were chosen on the basis of how familiar players would be with them and whether or not there were any licence fees attached.

» [SNES] To avoid running out of fuel, it was always a good idea to pull into the pitstop for a refill.

Besides, on the design side, the permanent split worked really well to give a sense of competition."

Time instead was spent on packing the game with many features, with the game largely being designed as the team went along. Nitros were included, for instance – three for each course. Each nitro would give players a temporary boost in acceleration and, by using them well, it was possible to gain a huge advantage.

"Nitros happened for several reasons," says Ritchie. "While tuning the road speed, we had really enjoyed turning it right up to 11 so nitros allowed for that extra burst of speed. But we were also influenced by the use of nitrous oxide in *The Dukes Of Hazzard* as well as speed-ups from other games. Once we had nitros, it became something we tuned for strategy, adjusting the number of nitros and the boost speed. Basically, we played the game a lot to tune things like that."

A lot of effort also went into the speed and smooth running of the game. "Smoothness was a given because we had to be able to run at 60Hz to use the approach that we were taking to generate the pseudo-3D track," Ritchie continues. "Speed was slightly more interesting. Initially everything was measured to use real-world units and gear modelling – it was incredibly slow and boring. So we played the game and speeded everything up and checked again how it played. Then we did it again and again until it was right on the edge of playable where the best of us could only just complete a race some of the time. Then we toned it down a bit but still had the nitros to get closer to the 'right on the edge' point."

**The result was a game that was still quite a bit slower than some of the speeds tried during development but what emerged was hugely playable.**

One of the most important parts of a racing game is how well the cars handle so the coders concentrated hard on the steering and the engine model. "The engine model started off as a gross simplification of a real engine with gearing," says Ritchie. "This was done in part to be able to drive the audio system but, during development, we had to adjust this a lot to make the game fun and give a real feeling of acceleration. This meant that the engine model shifted from being semi-realistic to purely what we needed to make the game feel good and still provide reasonable outputs to control revs, speedometers and audio. As for steering, it was always going to be limited by the pad inputs, so this involved some simple interpolation of horizontal movement speeds together with a lot of playtesting and iterative adjustment of the control parameters."

How the competitors behaved, however, was just as much of an evolution. Ritchie says the AI was "cobbled together" at first with no account taken of corners, hills or car parameters. "It was a fairly simple rubber-band system together with predicting target lane locations to avoid collisions," Ritchie says. "Once the basic system was in place, a per car parameter system was added to make the AI more individual and closer to what the player experiences. Finally, tables of adjustment data were applied to give

# TOP GEAR EVOLVES

## KEMCO'S SERIES CONTINUED TO MOVE FORWARD WITHOUT GREMLIN

### TOP GEAR RALLY

Although this was the first non-Gremlin *Top Gear* game, publisher KEMCO nevertheless wanted the game to continue on its Nintendo journey. *Rally* was released on the N64 in 1997, taking the series into off-road territory with a gorgeous graphically-detailed arcade game that boasted realistic physics and a great track design.

### TOP GEAR HYPER-BIKE

KEMCO commissioned *Top Gear Overdrive* as a sequel to *Top Gear Rally* before asking Snowblind Studios to mix things up a bit by introducing motorbikes to the franchise. Earmarked for the Nintendo 64 in 1999, it was developed at a time when motorbike racers were proving popular. Sadly, it lacked depth and the courses were too short.

### TOP GEAR POCKET

Ensuring handheld console gamers wouldn't miss out on the action, *Top Gear Pocket* pulled up on the Game Boy Color in 1999. Not only that, it had a battery-powered rumble function inside the cart – a gimmick in some sense yet an ambitious idea nonetheless. Whether that was only serving to mask the simplicity of the gameplay, is another matter entirely.

some modification of speed for corners and hills – though it's pretty obvious from playing the game that the AI cars don't exactly have the same limitations as the player car has."

*Top Gear* was released in Japan first – on the 27 March 1992. The North American release came the following month, with Europe finally seeing the game in November. By this time, thanks to great sales and favourable reviews, thoughts were already turning to the sequel. *Top Gear 2* would again be developed for the SNES (with Ritchie and Ashley as the coders) but versions were also made for the Mega Drive and Amiga too.

The first game had 32 tracks spread over eight countries. They had been designed by drawing a track layout, converting it into the corner data needed by the engine and manually adding hills. But a track design tool was created which combined a lot of this and made the development easier. As such, for the second game, there were 64 tracks across 16 countries.

"Since we had a working game from the get go this time around, we knew we'd have more time to tune the gameplay," says Ritchie. "The race was the primary consideration and we did a lot of iteration on the car's feel which was easier because of the changes we inherited from *Mansell*. We simply had more experience with racing games."

This time around, the developers decided to make the game feel a little more realistic, with faster and tougher opponents and cars that were difficult to handle. Instead of giving players a choice of four cars that had different acceleration, top speed and fuel consumption, for example, *Top Gear 2* would only allow a choice of colour. All the cars were the same to begin with and you could only improve your motor by performing well in races and earning sufficient cash for upgrades.

> **"WE JUST WANTED THE SECOND GAME TO BE BETTER THAN THE FIRST"**
> **ASHLEY BENNETT**

It gave an added incentive to do well while ensuring players would understand what it took to win races. By the time the second game was under development, Gremlin had also worked on *Nigel Mansell's World Championship* which used a tweaked version of the *Top Gear* engine (you can read about its creation in issue 227). "For *Top Gear 2*, we were on the third iteration of the underlying racing engine," Ritchie affirms. "A lot of bugs had been fixed, the base assets for the road system had been upgraded, and the car handling model had been extensively reworked."

***Nigel Mansell's World Championship* had used the full-screen for a single-player race rather than a split-screen and it was decided to carry this into *Top Gear 2* although Ritchie remained unconvinced.** Rather than waste more time debating the merits of this, effort was put into rewriting the code for the road. "It occurred to us that if we got the maths right, we could get closer to an F-Zero style but with hills," Ashley says.

Some tweaks were necessary. "We just wanted the second game to be better than the first," says Ashley. "So while the AI pretty much stayed the same from the original, the handling was changed and the way the roads worked made the corners different so we made adjustments there too." The result was a more refined racing experience that made great use of the full screen.

» [SNES] The developers decided against using the SNES' Mode 7 because they wanted to have hills.

"One of the refinements was to the way that the number of lanes displayed could change, adding the ability to either have a sharp edged change or ease in the new lanes," says Ritchie. "Quite early on we were also working on having splits in the road, but this was abandoned. Tunnels and side barriers were added or improved, as was some roadside texture."

In many ways, it was a good opportunity to keep adding features. "A damage model and upgrades came about as a result of early brainstorming sessions," Ritchie explains. "We also included weather changes which were, at least in part, a legacy of the *Mansell* game."

Michael Hirst worked on the bulk of the graphics this time around, but Paul Gregory, Sydney ▶

» [SNES] *Top Gear 2* had weather effects which was a legacy of the *Mansell* game that used the same engine.

## TOP GEAR: DARE DEVIL

■ Suddenly KEMCO turned a corner. In 2000, having been largely faithful to Nintendo (only *Top Gear 2* was released on non-Nintendo formats), the publisher released Papaya Studio's *Dare Devil* on the PlayStation 2. The idea was to collect Dare Devil tokens with a time limit while also gaining points for crashing into stuff.

## TOP GEAR DOWNFORCE

■ *Top Gear* pulled up for the final time in 2006 with an outing on the Nintendo DS. *Downforce* had 3D models, 30 vehicle options and lots of hazards, with the ability to use the touchscreen to add track obstacles of your own. Played top-down for the first time, it was something of another departure but one that was pleasingly innovative.

# CHASING THE HORIZON

## HOW THE ESSENCE OF GREMLIN'S GAMES LIVES ON

As coder Ashley Bennett says, "*Top Gear* is still very, very big in Brazil." No surprise, then, that Brazilian developer/publisher Aquiris Game Studio looked to pay tribute to the game when it released its own racer, *Horizon Chase* – a spiritual successor.

With a similar look and feel, albeit with modern presentation, the game made its debut as *Horizon Chase: World Tour* in 2015 for Android and iOS. It was then released on Nintendo Switch, PS4, Windows, Xbox One, Xbox Series, Mac and Linux as *Horizon Chase Turbo* in 2018. Three DLC packs have been created since including the October 2021 update, *Senna Forever*. As if to underline the past connection, Barry Leitch, who composed the music for the *Lotus* series and original *Top Gear* game, has also been strongly involved. He created the soundtrack for both *World Tour* and Turbo and his remit was to make it sound like the tunes he had produced 24 years earlier but re-imagined. "I just started composing, letting the music write itself," he said.

If you fancy having a listen (and you really should), an album of official soundtracks can be listened to and purchased on Barry's own website at bit.ly/Barrystunes

» [SNES] Crash the car and it would spin. You'd also be able to check for any damage.

Franklin and Paul Green were credited too. The backgrounds were improved, the cars felt chunkier and it continued to run at a blistering pace. There was some competition in the racing stakes from *Super Mario Kart* at this point but *Top Gear 2* was a more than capable opponent. Most other racers were being left standing.

Little wonder, then, that another game was commissioned shortly after *Top Gear 2* was released in August 1993. What's more, by November 1993, KEMCO had realised there was great value in the franchise so it sought to register *Top Gear* as a trademark. The move was opposed by the BBC in 1996 and the verdict ruled in the broadcaster's favour three years later.

**The third game in the series was to be called *Top Gear 3000* – the number relating to the year in which the game was set.** Having a futuristic vibe where players would travel from one planet to another to race meant the developers could unleash their creativity in a way they perhaps couldn't before. Yet

» [SNES] Money was needed for upgrades to the engine and tyres in *Top Gear 2*

» [SNES] Single-player games took up the whole screen in *Top Gear 2* rather than be split as in the first game.

» [SNES] It's a bit of a foggy day for a two-player split-screen race – and check out that speech bubble!

Ritchie didn't work on this game. "In late 1992, a group of us went from Gremlin to the Nintendo conference in Seattle to check out the new FX chip to see if we wanted to use it in future games," he says. "Coming back, there was a desire to create a second *Top Gear* sequel and another *Mansell* game. Ash went to *Top Gear 3000* but I ended up doing *Newman/Haas IndyCar Featuring Nigel Mansell*."

> **"THERE'S A LOT OF ME IN TOP GEAR 3000"**
> **ASHLEY BENNETT**

It left Ashley as the main coder with assistance from Matthew Donkin. Michael Hirst produced the graphics and extended his skills to the track design but Ashley says *Top Gear 3000* felt much more personal to him. "There's a lot of me in *Top Gear 3000*," he affirms.

For this third game, Gremlin simply wanted to do something different and the futuristic setting allowed the developers more leeway in their design choices while allowing them to move even further away from the limitations of realism. "We didn't want to do the same game again," says Ashley. "We wanted to make the third game look and feel different and there were some cool innovations too."

In came weapons such as a warp device, tools that allowed cars to jump and a magnetic attractor that would give speed by attracting your car to the one in front. There were also crazy upgrades such as a nuclear fusion engine. Jumping over cars was partly influenced by the feel of *Stunt Car Racer* but the overall design was also heavily shaped by the movies at the time. "Even so, development wasn't quite straightforward mainly because there were so many additions and change in style," recalls Ritchie.

"The FX chip was also tricky to work with because it would only run at full speed during the vertical blanking period."

The big tech innovation was a four-player Versus mode that required use of the Super Multitap peripheral. It split the screen into quarters – "so people played on these tiny, tiny little screens," Ashley says. But it wasn't easy to pull off. "We needed to use a custom Digital Signal Processor (DSP) because the base hardware couldn't work it all out," says Ashley. "Nintendo had used a DSP to help with Mode 7 scaling and rotation effects but you could program them yourself. We got all the kit we needed to do this and moved a lot of the maths for calculating the road into the DSP because it was light years faster. The resulting DSP-4 chip allowed the track to split into two, with one route forming a shortcut. "Whether it was worth the effort and the extra money per cartridge that Ian had to spend to get a custom DSP is debatable," says Ashley of a chip that only got used in one SNES game.

» [SNES] Some of the *Top Gear 3000* races seemed regular enough but see that blue patch to the right? Driving over it fixes damage to your car.

**Even so, the drive to create a four-player split-screen (one that ran at a blisteringly fast pace) had an inadvertent consequence: the creation of an over-the-top user interface which began with an elaborate intro about illegal intergalactic races occurring once every 1,000 years!** "That was because we didn't have the equipment to create a custom DSP for the first couple of months of the project so we just built a really fancy front end," Ashley says. There was also time to have pre-rendered cars. "A talented two-man 3D graphics team rendered cars with 30 polygons and Michael worked with what they produced. Theoretically, it looked better, although I'm not sure it really did!"

Even so, Ashley and his team had a blast. "The game was the least successful of Gremlin's three *Top Gear* titles but it was probably the most fun to write," he says, of the title first released in February 1995.

Sadly, however, it marked the end of Gremlin's involvement in the series, even though *Top Gear* continued for 11 more years (right through the period when the BBC revamped its show in 2002, too.) Ritchie says *Newman/Haas IndyCar Featuring Nigel Mansell* ended up being the final straight-line iteration of the *Top Gear* engine. Yet had Gremlin remained in the driving seat and continued to refine it, who knows which direction the series would have taken next? ✱

» [SNES] In *Top Gear 3000* players could choose different colours for their cars and purchase other enhancements with their credits.

LET HER RIP!!

» [SNES] *Top Gear 3000* was the only SNES game to use the DSP-4 chip.

» [SNES] See the moon backdrop in the screenshot below? Just one indicator that *Top Gear 3000* is set in the future.

# CLOCK WORK AQUARIO

Almost three decades since a near-complete version was canned, a lost arcade classic is finally in the hands of players. We speak to its creator Ryuichi Nishizawa on the journey of restoring this forgotten colourful pixel platformer

**WORDS BY ALAN WEN**

» [Switch] Big chunky pixel art is a rarity in modern pixel art, and Nishizawa hopes it might inspire young creators.

» [Switch] Of the three playable characters, pink-haired adventuress Elle Moon looks the most expressive.

**Typically, Retro Inspired covers new games that wish they were old, but *Clockwork Aquario* isn't really a new game.** In fact, it has existed since the early Nineties, intended as a comical action game for Japanese arcades. Developed by Westone, which already had a pedigree in action platformers, including *Wonder Boy*, *Monster Land* and *Monster Lair*, designer Ryuichi Nishizawa tells us, "*Clockwork Aquario* was planned as a continuation of that lineage. We thought we could expect a certain level of demand for an action game with comical characters running around the screen."

» Ryuichi Nishizawa, better known as the creator of the *Wonder Boy*/*Monster World* series, which also originated in the arcade.

Unfortunately, this was also around the same time that Japanese arcades were being taken over by the popularity of fighting games, in particular with *Street Fighter II*'s release in 1991. This new competitive battleground made it difficult for a cute character-based platformer such as *Clockwork Aquario* to stand out, proven by an attempt to conduct a location test when the game was about 90% complete. "The results did not reach the expected sales, and it seemed that the game would not sell even if it was released with such low numbers," Nishizawa admits. Despite trying to improve the game for several months, a second location test also failed to generate coins. "Our original plan had failed miserably. We had no choice but to stop the development of this game."

It was Westone's last attempt at making an arcade game, so one may assume that it would have tried to bring *Aquario* to consoles instead. It was likely the larger sprites and animations would have been too demanding for the 16-bit consoles at the time. While Nishizawa said there were discussions whenever another new console came out, it never came to pass, at least not until now thanks to a collaboration with Strictly Limited Games. While the belated release follows in the footsteps of Lizardcube's 2017 remake of *Wonder Boy: The Dragon's Trap* and Nishizawa's own remake of *Monster World IV*, he also says the journey to restoring *Aquario* had been sparked by an interview he had with US website Hardcore Gaming 101 back in 2011. "I found out that there were overseas fans who were interested in learning about the existence of *Aquario*, so I tracked down the source files and reported about it on Twitter. That was in 2012. That's when it all started."

Restoration of old games is no mean feat, especially when source code is often lost. For Nishizawa, the greater difficulty came from trying to restore a cancelled game, since there was no available finished product to compare it to. "The only people who had seen the finished product in action were the Westone development staff at the time and people who happened to play the game during location tests," he explains. "In the process of restoring the game from the source, we had to figure out what would look right on the screen, which colours should be displayed, what sound effects should be played? It is very difficult

» [Switch] The game supports co-op, where one player can pick up the other to throw at enemies.

» [Switch] There's surely no greater giveaway of a platformer from the Nineties than spike traps.

to determine what is appropriate. Even the person who created it doesn't remember exactly, so the first challenge was to establish a standard for judging what to consider complete."

**Fortunately, for the restoration project, Nishizawa was nonetheless able to wrangle together many of the original team members.** These included *Aquario*'s main programmer Takanori Kurihara, the main character designer and animator Mina Morioka, and boss designer Katsuo Saito, who also helped provide a wealth of material that has been compiled into an art book. The team also had help from Maki Ohzora, designer of *Monster World IV*'s Asha, who redrew backgrounds that had been lost from the original code, while former Westone composer Shinichi Sakamoto also prepared a new original soundtrack.

Save for a few optimisations for modern displays and controller input, *Aquario* is essentially the same game that Westone had set out to make three decades ago. "The game was developed for arcades, and it was designed to be played by people who drop by the game centre, see the screen, think it looks fun, put in some coins, play for a few minutes, and if they like it, put in more coins and play again and again," says Nishizawa. "That's what I felt when I came back to this game after a long time. I see this as an arcade game, not a home game." Nonetheless, he does draw comparisons with modern indie platformers (or "death games" as he refers to them) such as *Celeste* or *Super Meat Boy*. "In this project, I focused on recreating the original game, so I hope people will enjoy the style of a platform action game made for arcades."

But what next for Nishizawa after successfully excavating a piece of lost history? Is there still more to unearth or is the veteran developer looking forward? "Now that I'm living in Kyoto, I'm wondering if I can create a game set in the city. I sometimes get inspiration from the scenery I see when I walk around the city," he says, although he also teases the possibility of remaking games with a modern style. "For example, I'd like to recreate the arcade version of *Aurail* as a serious science-fiction epic with a cinematic touch. All of my titles have been developed under various restrictions, with repeated compromises – today's game development is almost completely free of capacity constraints, so it's a perfect environment for creators who have something they want to express." ✱

## IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** STRICTLY LIMITED GAMES/ININ GAMES
- **» DEVELOPER:** WESTONE BIT ENTERTAINMENT
- **» RELEASE:** OUT NOW
- **» PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION 4, SWITCH
- **» GENRE:** ARCADE ACTION

# STRICTLY RETRO

### Strictly Limited's involvement in restoring a lost classic

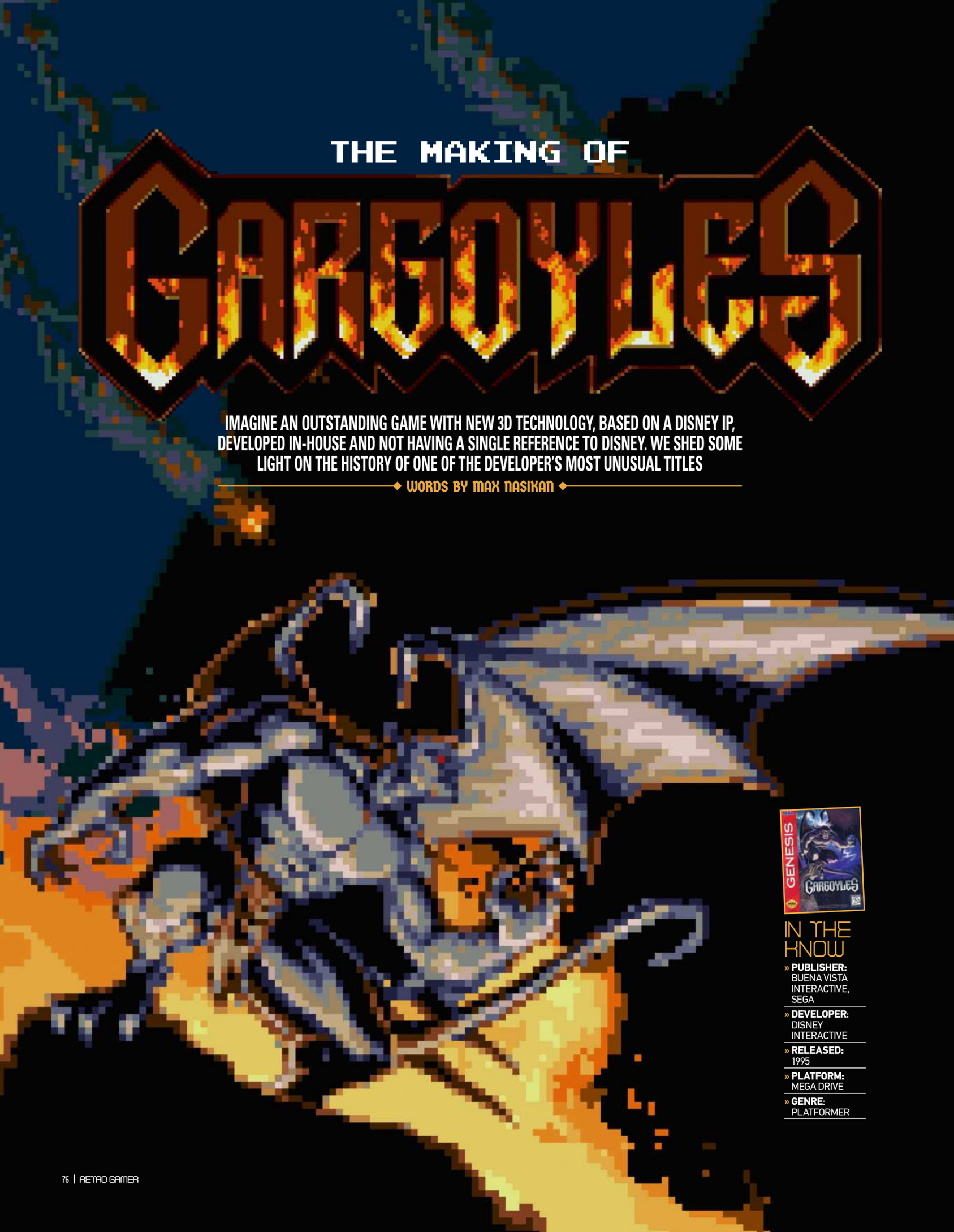
As well as Nishizawa and members of the original team, *Aquario*'s restoration involved a number of key partners, not least emulation wizard M2 that was first given the recovered source files back in 2015. Another important partner is Strictly Limited Games, which isn't just publishing and packaging the game for a proper physical release on both Switch and PS4, but also had a hand in development. According to a Nintendo Life interview, co-founder Dennis Mendel said that they were entrusted with the code and got a working demo to present to original programmer Kurihara during Tokyo Game Show in 2019. The German company had also been responsible for salvaging and resurrecting the cancelled game *Ultracore*, a Mega Drive title originally developed by Digital Illusions (now DICE) back in 2020.

Strictly Limited is just one of a few specialist publishers like Limited Run Games that focus on bringing limited physical releases of games that you can own and hold in your hands, with a specific focus on niche but beloved retro titles. Naturally, these physical releases go all out, with *Aquario* launching with a *Collector's Edition*, which includes a PCB retro box, a hardcover art book, an arcade flyer featuring control instructions and illustrations, and other physical goodies, while an *Ultra Collector's Edition* includes figurines of the three main characters Huck Londo, Elle Moon and Gush. Of course, for those who are just interested in the game, publisher ININ is also ensuring the game is available digitally to as wide an audience as possible.

# THE MAKING OF GARGOYLES

IMAGINE AN OUTSTANDING GAME WITH NEW 3D TECHNOLOGY, BASED ON A DISNEY IP, DEVELOPED IN-HOUSE AND NOT HAVING A SINGLE REFERENCE TO DISNEY. WE SHED SOME LIGHT ON THE HISTORY OF ONE OF THE DEVELOPER'S MOST UNUSUAL TITLES

WORDS BY MAX NASIKAN






## IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** BUENA VISTA INTERACTIVE, SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** DISNEY INTERACTIVE
- **RELEASED:** 1995
- **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

**PATRICK GILMORE**
SENIOR PRODUCER

**JOEL GOODSELL**
LEAD LEVEL DESIGNER

**THOM ANG**
LEAD ARTIST

**CHRIS SHRIGLEY**
PROGRAMMER

**PATRICK COLLINS**
AUDIO ENGINEER AND SOUND DESIGNER

**ED TRILLO**
3D ARTIST AND 3D ANIMATOR

**In 1994, Disney was developing an animated series about mythical winged guards.** It was an obvious decision to involve the newly formed Disney Interactive Studio in the creation of a game based on the franchise. "In the Interactive division, we were part of consumer products and often got to hear about new Disney properties well in advance of their public announcements," recalls senior producer Patrick Gilmore. "I was meeting with Disney TV Animation execs regarding *Darkwing Duck*. At the meeting, I got to see a very early pitch of *Gargoyles* and thought it had a ton of promise as a game that combined platforming, combat and limited flight."

The original game was developed by the DI team for Sega's Mega Drive, along with a port for the Super Nintendo. It was planned that both versions would hit store shelves in time for the VHS release of the animated series in October 1995. The show turned out to be a daring and unexpected project for Disney, as it was designed for a more mature audience than the rest of the series found on the Disney Afternoon block.

However, the game took things a step further, as TV Animation did not add the usual constraints that usually come with big feature film videogame adaptations. "It came with a little more freedom, and the team responded with a strong desire not just to build on the creative equity of the show, but to expand and add dimension and realism to it," Patrick continues. "It was said on the team that we didn't want to make a game that felt like it existed strictly within the boundaries of the TV show. Instead, we wanted it to feel like both the game and the show were inspired by the same 'real' source material."

> "THE TEAM RESPONDED WITH A STRONG DESIRE NOT JUST TO BUILD ON THE CREATIVE EQUITY OF THE SHOW, BUT TO EXPAND AND ADD DIMENSION AND REALISM TO IT"
> PATRICK GILMORE

Another reason for the discrepancy between the series and the game was the fact that at the time of the game's creation, the show had not yet appeared on television. "We had to develop the game aesthetic with very limited exposure to the show's art and characters for a long time," explains lead level designer Joel Goodsell. "We had the character and art bible and scripts for the first six episodes, but nothing else for I think the first year. We didn't see the episodes until they were on TV. So we all largely guessed."

There are parallels with the plot of the show, and the game focuses on Goliath, the head of the gargoyle clan. The story starts in medieval Scotland, then, after a thousand years of sleep, Goliath finds himself adventuring in modern New York. Otherwise, the DI team went their own way, building a story around the Eye Of Odin, a Viking artefact capable of transforming humans and robots into monsters. "We previewed much of our development with Disney TV Animation," says lead artist Thom Ang. "They were interested in our MacGuffin and developed their own storyline based on the artefact. But I think they missed the mythological point of the Eye as I designed it. Odin's ravens, Huginn and Muninn were his eyes and ears out in the world. Having them encircling the gem created a perfect 'eye' shape and it fit the myth."

In addition, many of *Gargoyles*' key characters weren't even mentioned in the game. "Since we only had access to the first six scripts, we didn't have a strong idea of how core Elisa, Brooklyn, Broadway and Lexington would be to Goliath," explains Joel. "So their involvement was sacrificed in favour of a more focused story and more enemy characters – cart capacity was extremely limited. If we'd had more time and more memory, I'd have involved Elisa in a mentor capacity, possibly even as an NPC partner in one mission, and would have involved the three gargoyles as power-up attacks you could call in. And I'd have involved Xanatos and Demona in the story in a more core way."

It wasn't just the characters on the show that didn't make it to the final product. Three levels – the museum, hydro plant and a level which included the castle atop Xanatos' skyscraper and the atrium below – ended up on the cutting room floor. The bosses also underwent a reshuffle or were completely changed. "There was a siege-ram map originally as the boss of the castle, but conceptually in early blockout it wasn't working – thus the sorcerer boss was born," recalls Joel.

It's easy to see that, among other things, the final game has become much darker than its source material. "The TV show was very popular but had a harder edge than other Disney properties," programmer Chris Shrigley tells us. "The people designing and running ▶

» [Mega Drive] Looking at stunning locations like this, it's hard to believe that the levels in the game are made up of repeating tiles.

» [Mega Drive] While it never received a worldwide release, a version of *Gargoyles* did make it to Brazil.

## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**MAUI MALLARD (PICTURED)**
**SYSTEM:** MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS
**YEAR:** 1995

**MICKEY MANIA**
**SYSTEM:** MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS
**YEAR:** 1994

**DISNEY'S TARZAN**
**SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION, VARIOUS
**YEAR:** 1999

## DARKNESS AND LIGHT

**MORE 16-BIT ERA HEROES WITH SIMILAR SKILLS TO GOLIATH**

### BATMAN

**BATMAN RETURNS (MEGA DRIVE)**

The most popular comic-book hero of the Nineties revived interest in the Gothic style and served as a reference for the *Gargoyles* game. Batman also uses his wing-like cloak to extend his jump trajectory.

### FIREBRAND

**DEMON'S CREST (SNES)**

The final part of the *Gargoyle's Quest* trilogy starred a demon named Firebrand. Along with Goliath, he also cannot fly freely; his wings only give him limited freedom of movement and the ability to hover in the air.

### NIGHTCRAWLER

**X-MEN 2: CLONE WARS (MEGA DRIVE)**

Kurt Wagner, better known as Nightcrawler, is devoid of wings but endowed with a pointed tail. In addition to the ability to teleport, he can climbs walls and ceilings with the dexterity of *Gargoyles*' Goliath.

the project all had a desire to make something not-so-Disney and more in line with the games we were playing and enjoying ourselves." Interestingly, the atmosphere of the game about the winged guard was largely influenced by the Dark Knight. "I was the resident Goth and moody artist-in-black with a penchant for graphic novels and *Batman* comic books," recalls Thom. "I was influenced by darker comic books like Mike Mignola's *Hellboy*, David Mazzucchelli's visuals on *Batman: Year One* and, of course, Frank Miller's *Dark Knight Returns*. We hadn't seen any completed episodes until we were deep into our own production. So I kind of made it my own. I was young, brash and arrogant back then, and I was trying to make my mark."

> "HARD DIFFICULTY WAS SERIOUSLY EPIC. I THINK THAT'S ONE OF THE REASONS WHY THIS GAME COMES UP IN CONVERSATION STILL: BEATING THAT GAME ON HARD IS A REAL BADGE OF HONOUR"
> JOEL GOODSELL

The game also turned out to be quite brutal by Disney standards. In particular, people are killed in it, including Valkyries, who scream when defeated. "If I recall, it was one of the artists, Ann-Bettina Colace who did the Valkyrie scream," says sound designer and audio engineer Patrick Collins. "I remember there was a marketing meeting going on while we were recording in my office, and they all got freaked out because they were hearing a woman scream. I had to apologise to them and explain it was for the *Gargoyles* game."

» [Mega Drive] With its plasma hammer, the Thor 3000 is one of the most formidable foes you can face.

Unlike the usual cartoon violence when the figure of the enemy disappears in a cloud of smoke or something similar, here the corpses were left lying on the ground. "We felt that by making enemies disappear, we were confirming that they were dead, and it felt more violent as a result," explains Patrick Gilmore. "By leaving the enemies on-screen, we felt they were plausibly knocked out, and could return to consciousness and combat in short order." However, due to Goliath's ability to hurl defeated enemies from a height of tens of metres, the fate of some of his opponents was sealed. "We never specifically said the human antagonists were dead," Joel continues. "But after the opening show episode had Goliath knocking an antagonist from a castle wall, we absolutely didn't shy away from being able to throw those same enemies off castle walls as well."

**It is truly ironic that the very game that was created by Disney in-house ended up being so far removed from Disney's typical standards.**

"I think we got away with a lot simply because people who rubber-stamped stuff didn't really get it," explains Chris. "I'm not sure 'they' understood what we were proposing and ultimately building. The game was pushing the Disney boundaries pretty hard, and we knew it. I'm surprised we got away with it really, as it is a dark, violent game."

Apart from the general darkness, *Gargoyles* turned out to be a rather difficult game as well. And even though the creators simplified the progress-save system on levels, only the most hardcore players could see the final credits of the game. "Hard difficulty was seriously epic. For a long time, no one at DI could beat it," recalls Joel. "We had one requirement for hard mode before we submitted it to Sega for approval – one person had to beat it on hard mode with a videotaped

» [Mega Drive] Jets of flame will bring a lot of surprises to the player as they explore.

» [Mega Drive] With a flap of his huge wings, Goliath can extend the trajectory of his jump, which is rather handy.

» [Mega Drive] These wolf-like robots are just a light warm-up for what awaits our brave hero.

verification. I think that's one of the reasons why this game comes up in conversation still – beating that game on hard is a real badge of honour."

Without a doubt, the final level in the steel plant was the biggest challenge for players and it remains a tough gauntlet today. "The Forge level was particularly difficult, and I think I only managed to run through it a few times, myself," Chris recalls. "We relied a lot on the game testers in QA, who were all hardcore gamers at the time, and they seemed to like it. Also, it's easy to lose perspective on playability and balance when you've played something countless times and see it every single day for months on end."

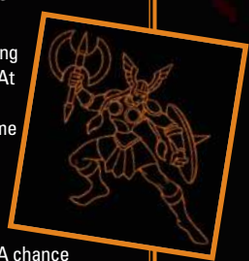
"Actually, all the levels originally only included two maps and a boss, all of which – except the subway – got expanded to three maps and a boss. But we also added more maps to The Forge level late in production because of inspiration during late-night coffee-infused insanity of a 25-year-old," Joel grins. Thom also appreciates his own work on the final level, "The Forge with all the various bosses is my favourite setting that I concepted. So, I think it's appropriate to keep a player in there for an eternity."

Whether the increased difficulty of the game is considered a pro or con is a moot point, but the indisputable dignity of *Gargoyles* is its animation. Hand-drawn animation was handled by two third-party studios – Creative Capers and Renegade Animation – as well as several of DI's own animators. However, with so many outsourced studios, all 3D robot animations were done by Disney Interactive in-house. "I did most of the 3D animation which was still very much R&D at the time," says 3D artist and animator Ed Trillo. "Everything was done in-house on Alias and 3D Studio. I don't know many other companies that were doing similar techniques for their SNES and Genesis games back in 1994 so I wouldn't be surprised if we were among the first. I am 99% sure, however, we were the first using Silicon Graphics machines and Alias to render sprites for 16-bit consoles! When I was there building those robots, I honestly felt like we were on top of the world with the most talented team on the planet."

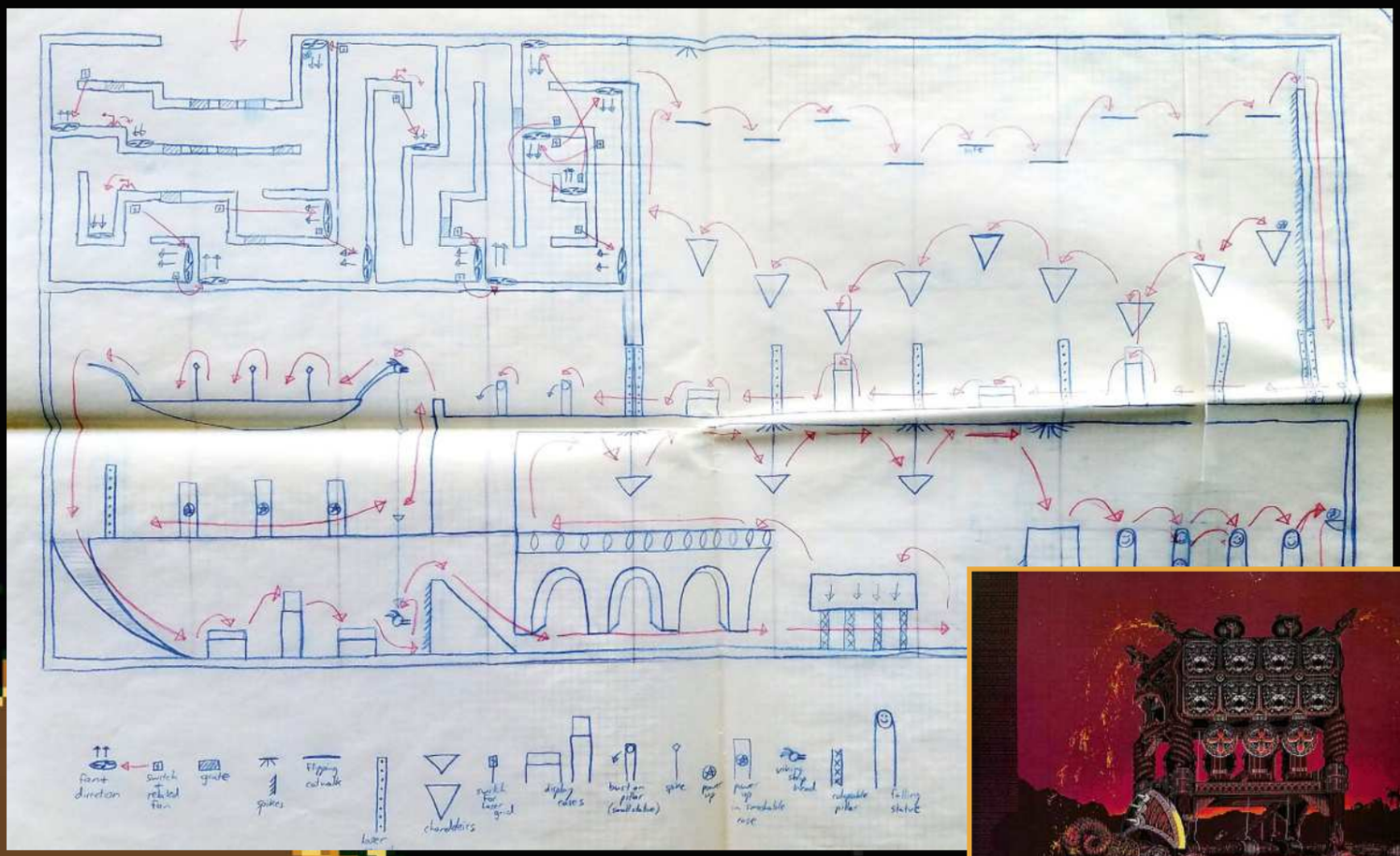
**In addition to realistic animation, *Gargoyles* amazed thanks to numerous technical aspects.** While many of the team were newcomers, Chris had gone through a long course in the game industry by then. "*Gargoyles* was pretty much the last game I made for Genesis and contained all the stuff I'd learned from previous projects, along with all the experience and expertise I'd accumulated on the platform over the five years or so I'd been working on it," he says. "Out of all the games I've worked on, *Gargoyles* is still one of my favourites. To me, it's some of my best coding. There were some cool effects using various playfields and scrolling that were cool at the time. The elevator rotating a few degrees using some hardware scrolling tricks. The subway parallax with the pseudo-3D ceiling. I remember showing the subway scroller to Mark Lorenzen, who was ▶

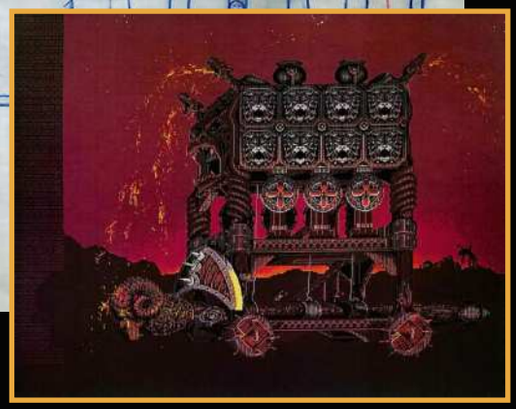
## MIGHTY THOM

### LEAD ARTIST THOM ANG TELLS US ABOUT HIS INSPIRATION FOR CREATING THE VIKINGS



"I was developing visual designs for Viking lore," Thom tells us. "At the time, most of my Viking knowledge came from Marvel Comics' *The Mighty Thor*, particularly, the great Walt Simonson's run as writer and artist." A chance meeting soon provided Thom with the inspiration he needed, and it came directly from the source. "I had a chance to meet with Walt unrelated to the *Gargoyles* production," Thom continues. "I told him what I was working on and asked him what inspired his *Thor* stories, and what [Viking] research he did. He walks into his studio and pulls a book from his library. He says everything he knew about Vikings came from this one book. Then he gives me the book. I was really touched by this." Unfortunately, Thom's anecdote has a sad ending. "Sadly, I searched for the book through multiple boxes in my garage recently. No luck. And I don't know the specific book title."



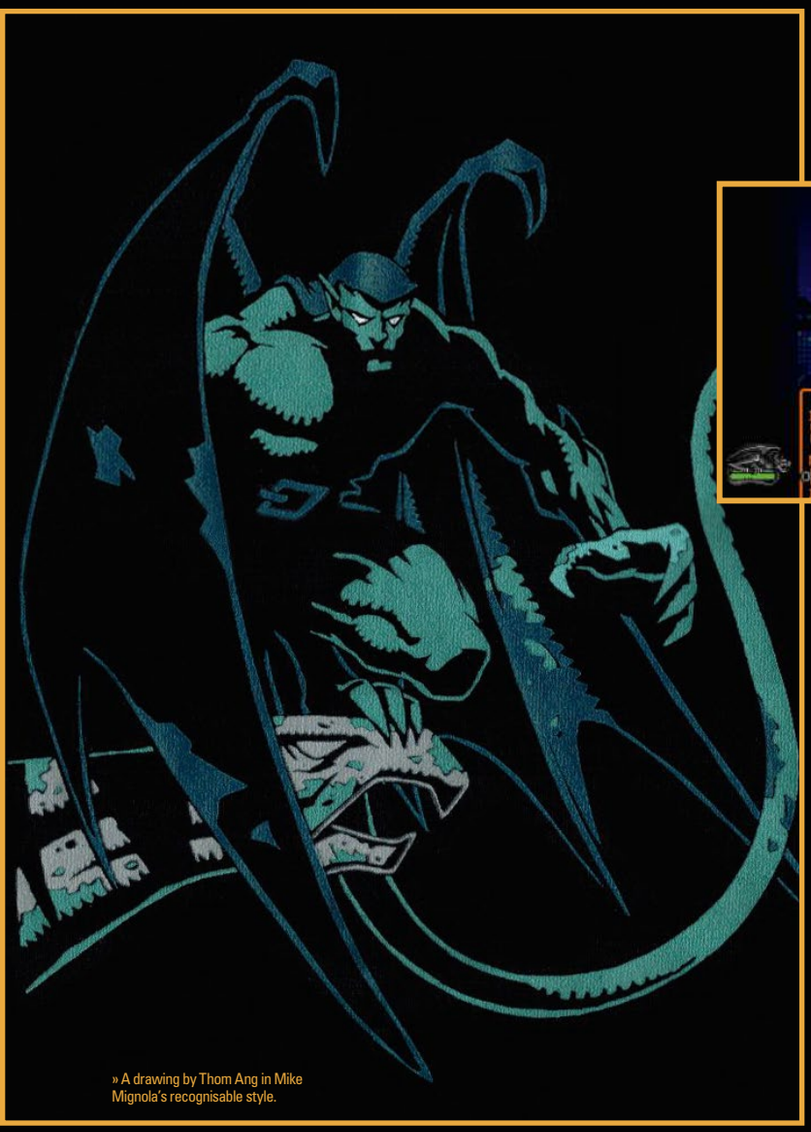
» Above: level design of the cancelled level in the museum. Right: The siege-ram was originally conceived as a boss in the first level.

visiting the office, and him being blown away by it. High praise from the guy that designed *Vectorman*. I was quite chuffed at the time."

**No doubt the *Gargoyles* team was pushing the limits of the Sega console.** However, even in cases where these limits entailed obvious bugs, the creators could turn the situation in their favour. "I pushed to get a ridiculous amount of shrapnel to throw up when the elevator crashed at the end of the third level," Joel recalls with a smile. "We received a TRC violation about game slowdown. We sent it back saying that the slow motion was a cinematic feature for dramatic effect. They accepted that and it shipped with all the shrapnel."

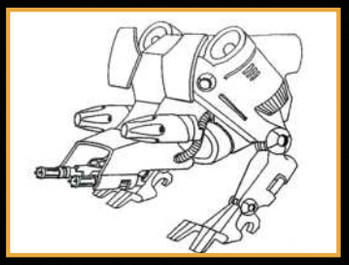
But no matter how daring or technically outstanding the project turned out to be in the end, it could only reach the players through the company's marketing department. With an eye on the overall darkness featured in *Gargoyles*, an unprecedented decision was made to remove all Disney references in the game. So the developer and publisher became Buena Vista Interactive, one of the subsidiary labels of Disney.

*Gargoyles* was released on Genesis in the States in November 1995. In the midst of sales, the planned SNES release was still promised in print ads, but the expectations of the owners of 16-bit Nintendo consoles were in vain. "The SNES version had a separate programmer. Originally, I was on both versions and both were supposed to share the same design, assets and maps," Joel explains. "The different tech and art requirements



» A drawing by Thom Ang in Mike Mignola's recognisable style.

» (Mega Drive) AI of the enemies is precise – these robots are capable of delivering maximum hassle to any player.



» A pair of robots not included in the game. The one above was named Trillobot after 3D artist Ed Trillo.

and capabilities of the SNES and Genesis required more departure between the two over time, and another designer was brought on to focus on SNES, while myself and Chris focused on the Genesis. The SNES began to lag behind the Genesis version over time, which also drove some personal conflicts. The Genesis version itself was walking a tightrope at the same time. Eventually, it was clear that we needed to focus and get one version out the door."

The oddities with the releases did not end there. Despite the fact that the game has garnered a lot of praise in the reviews of the American gaming press, and the *Gargoyles* franchise itself is based on European mythology, there was no release on Mega Drive in Europe. Why did that happen? Patrick Gilmore explains his theory, "The Genesis version had Sega US as a publishing partner. I am not sure whether the *Gargoyles* TV show had even been syndicated in other territories yet, so it's quite possible the property was not well-known at the time outside of the US, which, in turn, drove challenges in finding a publishing partner outside of the States."

After the release of *Gargoyles*, Disney Interactive no longer got involved in the development of console games. And after a couple of years, it remained in the videogame market only as a publisher. *Gargoyles* may have fallen short of the company's profit expectations but there's more to this story than money. Despite the fact that soon after the release of the game the creators' paths diverged, *Gargoyles* cemented many friendships for the next quarter of a century. "This was almost everyone's first game. We were all very young," concludes Joel. "I still really like that we went with a more painterly look and a bit more edge than the source material – it was true to who we were as a group and I'm proud of that. Most of us have worked together over the last 25 years at various companies and remain friends." ✱

**"THE GAME WAS DEFINITELY PUSHING THE DISNEY BOUNDARIES PRETTY HARD, AND WE KNEW IT. I'M SURPRISED WE GOT AWAY WITH IT REALLY, AS IT IS A DARK, VIOLENT GAME"**
**CHRIS SHRIGLEY**

**Thanks to Joel Goodsell, Patrick Gilmore, Thom Ang, Chris Shrigley, Patrick Collins and Ed Trillo for sharing their memories and artefacts.**

## VECTOR PRIME

### THE TRUE STORY OF THE MOST UNUSUAL DEDICATION SCREEN YOU MAY EVER SEE

Hidden deep in the code of *Gargoyles* is a mesmerising dance of balls, which you would likely expect to find in *Vectorman*. On top of the words of gratitude from the programmer, the player can change the shape of the figures, the distance between the balls and also rotate the figures. And all this is accompanied by techno music!

"There were some things I wanted to do in code, like vector balls," says Chris Shrigley, "which I actually coded up and got working but never made it into the game. The code is still in there, though."

"Chris and I were both fans of techno music, and he asked if I would compose something in a techno style for him, so I did," recalls Patrick Collins. "You will hear my voice scream 'Sega!' when that 3D ball screen comes up. At the time, Sega had some commercials that involved screaming 'Sega!' I thought it would be funny to have the Sega title when you first power on the game do that. So we had my voice scream 'Sega!' when you'd turn on *Gargoyles*. But the executives didn't like it so it got taken out, but Chris added it to the secret screen."

# No One Can Stop Mr Domino

## WHO WOULD BE FOOLISH ENOUGH TO TRY?

» PLAYSTATION » 1998 » ARTDINK

**I've recently been digging through my stack of PlayStation demo CDs, and I've come to realise just how much I miss them.** While the early discs could be pretty light on content, the later ones provided plenty of entertainment value with lots of demos as well as Net Yaroze games, cheat save files and even video compilations of readers' best goals. Of course, what I prized was the chance to try a wider range of games than we could ever afford, including some I never would have normally considered.

*No One Can Stop Mr Domino* is definitely a game that I'd have skipped over without the demo. It isn't the most exciting game to look at in still screenshots, and with all due respect to the writers of the time, it'd be very hard to convey just how thoroughly weird the game is without being able to show it in action. It's a good kind of weird, mind. There are very few games that are directly comparable, with the closest being *NiGHTS Into Dreams* – both games see the main character moving around a circuit and setting up tricks of some kind to achieve high scores, but Sonic Team's game certainly doesn't feature the same bizarre comic animations, seemingly random scale changes or unusual sound design. Since my local video rental store didn't get it in, there's absolutely no way I'd have given it a chance without the demo – the premise is certainly intriguing, but enough to pass up the likes of *Final Fantasy VII* or *Gran Turismo* on the budget *Platinum* range? Not a chance.

At the time, I had no idea just how significant the game would be for me. I replayed it in 2013, and soon afterwards made the journey down to Bournemouth to interview for a job. As part of that interview I had to write about a retro game, and I chose *No One Can Stop Mr Domino* – I was worried that I was taking a risk by choosing a cult favourite, but hoped it might stand out from more common choices. It must have gone OK, because I wouldn't be here to tell you about this if it hadn't.

SO YOU WANT TO COLLECT...

# GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

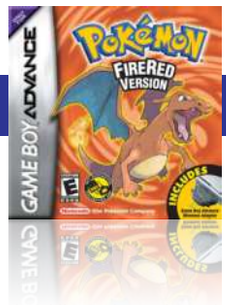
**With over 1,500 games available, Nintendo's Game Boy Advance has something for all tastes, and retro gamers are especially well catered for with dazzling remakes of the classics, original titles with gobsmacking pixel art and a host of inventive curios**

Words by Ashley Day

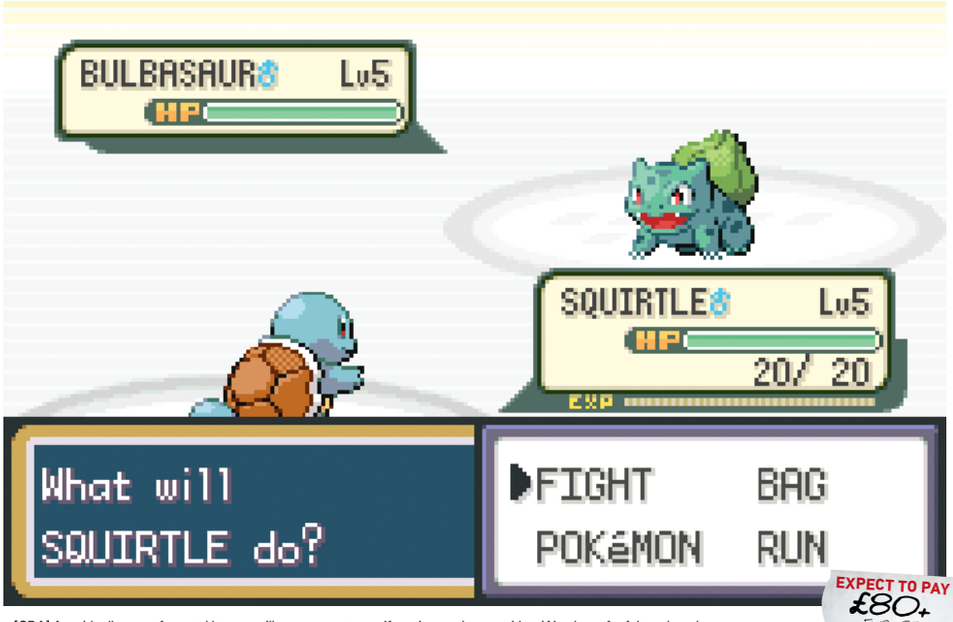
GOTTA SNAG 'EM ALL

## POKÉMON FIRERED/ LEAFGREEN

**DEVELOPER:** GAME FREAK
**RELEASE:** 2004



■ Remakes are now a regular feature in the *Pokémon* series, but back in 2004 the idea was completely fresh, and, some might say, necessary. Although the backwards compatibility of Game Boy Advance allowed owners to plug in and enjoy the original *Pokémon* Game Boy cartridges, it was impossible to trade monsters from your old cart to the new generation introduced with *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire*. So *FireRed* and *LeafGreen* didn't just offer fans an opportunity to replay a favourite adventure with a fresh coat of paint, it also reintroduced the iconic original 151 monsters back into play. Trading and battling had become such an important part of *Pokémon* fandom by 2004 that Nintendo packaged every copy of *FireRed* and *LeafGreen* with a Game Boy Advance Wireless Adapter to facilitate convenient connection between players. This extra gizmo, along with the general popularity of the *Pokémon* series, and the collectible nature of the GBA's library, has made *FireRed* and *LeafGreen* one of the pricier Nintendo games on the handheld machine.




EXPECT TO PAY £80+ EUROPE

» [GBA] As with all games featured here, you'll save more money if you just grab a cartridge. Watch out for fakes, though.

EXPECT TO PAY £30+ JAPAN

### SOMETHING IN THE AIR

More uses for the Game Boy Advance Wireless Adapter

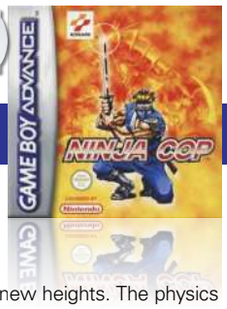
The Game Boy Advance Wireless Adapter was released pretty late in the GBA's life (2004 was also the year the DS debuted) but the gadget did go on to be compatible with around 30 other games including *Pokémon Emerald*, the *Mario* sports games, the *Classic NES* series and even the quirky *bit Generations* collection (which you can read about on the next page). The adapter also has a rather neat hidden search feature… turn on your GBA with only the adapter plugged in and you can use it to search for any nearby people playing a compatible game. That one, admittedly, isn't much of a selling point today.

EXPECT TO PAY £125+ USA

MONEY FOR BOLD ROPE

# NINJA COP

EXPECT TO PAY £740+ USA




**DEVELOPER:** HUDSON SOFT
**RELEASE:** 2003

■ Taking influence from the likes of *Shinobi*, *Rolling Thunder* and *Elevator Action*, *Ninja Cop* boasts shuriken and sword action so satisfying that it deserves to proudly stand side by side with the classics. But it also has an ace up its sleeve; a ninja rope that can be fired onto a platform so you can freely swing around and reach new heights. The physics are arcadey enough so that anyone can master them, but loose enough that you can really have some fun too. Sadly, *Ninja Cop* was a little too stealthy for its own good and its release went by almost completely unnoticed. By the time anyone realised how cool it was, collectors were beginning to hoard the mini masterpiece and prices had gone through the roof. If you want this now, you might just have to kill someone for it…

EXPECT TO PAY £400+ EUROPE

» [GBA] *Ninja Cop* came out swinging as one of the coolest games on GBA… and was virtually ignored on release.

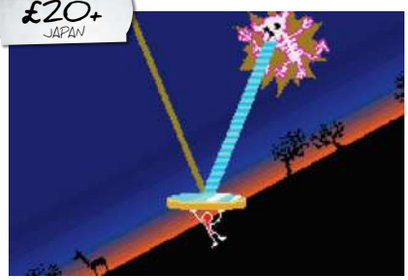
TWIST YOUR ARM

# WARIOWARE: TWISTED!

**DEVELOPER:** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
**RELEASE:** 2004

■ While the first *WarioWare* is a stone-cold classic that definitely belongs in your GBA collection, its inventive sequel shouldn't be overlooked either. *WarioWare: Twisted!* offered even more of the zany microgames that made the original *WarioWare* so fresh and vital, but this time it came on an oversized cartridge with a gyro sensor built in for full tilt control. The fun of turning your Game Boy Advance in the air to control the microgames – like moving an electric razor around to remove the stubble from a man's chin – is something that just never gets old, and can't really be replicated with emulation. You really need the actual cartridge in your collection to get the most out of this one and now is the time to get it before those prices really start to shoot up.

EXPECT TO PAY £20+ JAPAN



EXPECT TO PAY £75+ USA

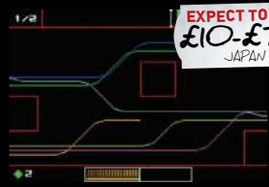
» [GBA] *Yoshi's Universal Gravitation* is the only other GBA game to feature a tilt sensor. Sadly, it's not as good as *WarioWare: Twisted!*.

SMALL CHANGE

# bIT GENERATIONS

**DEVELOPER:** SKIP LTD & Q-GAMES
**RELEASE:** 2006

■ Released extremely late in the GBA's life, the *bit Generations* series is the sort of project you're much more likely to see as a digital exclusive these days. In fact, its immediate successor, the *Art Style* series for WiiWare and DSiWare never did get a physical release. In total there were seven games in the series with six of them developed by Skip Ltd (*Chibi-Robo*) and one game, *Digidrive*, developed by Q-Games (*PixelJunk*). Each of the games features minimalist visuals and very simple, often experimental gameplay, and comes packaged in tiny presentation cases with iconic graphic design. The packaging alone makes *bit Generations* extremely collectible and if you like one of them then you'll probably want the whole set. Prices for some games in the series are relatively cheap, but they are all rising in price.



EXPECT TO PAY £10-£70 JAPAN

» [GBA] Players with a Wi-Fi Adapter can enjoy *Coloris*, *Boundish* and *Digidrive* in multiplayer.

## GENERATION GAMES

Detailing each of the seven bit Generations releases

### BOUNDISH

It's *Pong* but with various twists, like a court that takes place on a revolving vinyl record.
JAPAN £24+

### COLORIS

A colour-matching puzzler that's big on combos and boasts an eye-catching limited colour palette.
JAPAN £10+

### DIALHEX

An addictive puzzle game where you have to rotate shapes to form hexagons of one single colour.
JAPAN £16+

### DIGIDRIVE

A puzzle game about managing traffic at a crossroads. Like other *bit Generations* games it can become rather addictive.
JAPAN £12+

### DOTSTREAM

Imagine if *Tron*'s light cycles were used to make a primitive top-down racing game and you've got *Dotstream*.
JAPAN £21+

### ORBITAL

Control a star as it orbits planetoids and use their gravity to alter your star's momentum and pick up handy collectibles.
JAPAN £22+

### SOUNDVOYAGER

The final game we're looking at in the *bit Generations* range is a release that's so minimalist, it barely uses graphics at all. Instead the player relies on sound in order to navigate the world. In fact, it's possible to enjoy the game without looking at the screen at all!
JAPAN £50+

## COLLECTING TIPS!

### Don't fake it
GBA piracy has been rife for decades and online auctions are flooded with counterfeit goods. Learn how to spot a fake cart and don't be fooled!

### Go SP
The GBA SP, with its frontlit screen, clamshell design, rechargeable battery and backwards compatibility, is the best of the GBA models. An AGS-101 version is even better.

### Take chances
There are so many games on GBA that it can be fun to take chances on one of the 1,500+ carts available. You might even discover a hidden gem!

### Import away
Many of the GBA's finest games were Japan-only, so make sure to be aware of the best import classics. Thankfully, all GBA hardware is region-free so you can play them all.

A TACTICAL PURCHASE

# SHINING FORCE: RESURRECTION OF THE DARK DRAGON

EXPECT TO PAY £90+ USA

**DEVELOPER:** AMUSEMENT VISION
**RELEASE:** 2004

EXPECT TO PAY £30+ EUROPE

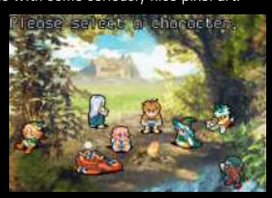
If you like strategy RPGs then the GBA is a must-have console with several standout examples of the genre. This was the first system to get an English language *Fire Emblem*, and in *Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon* it has a great remake of one of the best SRPGs ever. The original Mega Drive classic is well-known for its mix of tactical battles and town exploration, and the remake expands on this with colourful new graphics, an entirely new storyline with bonus battles, and three new characters, including one that uses a unique collectible-card battle system. If you're a fan of the series (and you should be) then this is a real treat.

» [GBA] *Shining Force*'s new visuals are more detailed than on Mega Drive, but still retain their original charm.

## SHINING SOUL
GBA's other two Shining games

EXPECT TO PAY £15+ JAPAN

*Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon* wasn't the only *Shining* game released on GBA. In keeping with series tradition, there are also spin-off games in other RPG subgenres. In this case, the two *Shining Soul* games took the series in the *Diablo*-like dungeon-crawling action RPG direction. While fans grumbled that these Grasshopper-developed titles played fast and loose with *Shining* canon, they're still fun little RPGs with some seriously nice pixel art.




SPEEDING TICKET

# F-ZERO CLIMAX

EXPECT TO PAY £150+ JAPAN

**DEVELOPER:** SUZAK
**RELEASE:** 2004

» [GBA] *F-Zero Climax* pushes Mode 7-style graphics to their absolute limit and looks amazing.

Really, if you own a Game Boy Advance and you want to play an *F-Zero* game then there are far more affordable alternatives to *F-Zero Climax*. You'll find two other *F-Zero* games on the system, each of which offers futuristic racing that's just as good, and at a fraction of the price. But only *F-Zero Climax* can claim the distinction of being the last F-Zero game Nintendo released. (So far at least, although it's been 18 years and the chances of a new game are looking slimmer all the time.) As the final game in its series, *F-Zero Climax* is naturally attractive to collectors, but it's very well-made too. The futuristic racing is just as fun as ever, it boasts slick Mode 7-style visuals, and this is the second game in the series (including the super rare 64DD disk) to include a full track editor, effectively giving it infinite replay value.

PENNIES FROM HEAVEN

# RHYTHM TENGOKU

EXPECT TO PAY £20+ JAPAN

**DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO SPD
**RELEASE:** 2006

When the *WarioWare* team got together to create a rhythm action spin on the minigame collection, right at the tail end of the GBA's life, it's fair to say that no one expected much from it. Nintendo didn't even see fit to release it outside Japan. But those who did give it a chance will have found a late entry into the GBA all-timer list. The *WarioWare* team's flair for simple yet smart gameplay and sharp-witted humour is in full effect, now with a series of catchy tunes unbelievably squeezed onto the tiny cart. The masterstroke of *Rhythm Tengoku* is that once you've played a handful of musical minigames, you get to play a climactic level that remixes all of the preceding songs and their matching minigames into one glorious super level. There have been a few *Rhythm Tengoku* games since, but this is the original and purest version.

» [GBA] The original *Rhythm Tengoku* also has an arcade version, created by Sega. UK readers can find it at Arcade Club in Bury!

## MORE GAMES TO CONSIDER

### CASTLEVANIA DOUBLE PACK
**DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
**RELEASED:** 2006
**EXPECT TO PAY:**
EUROPE **£45-£175**, USA: **£125+**

### METROID FUSION
**DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO R&D1
**RELEASED:** 2002
**EXPECT TO PAY:**
EUROPE **£65+**, USA: **£125+**, JAPAN: **£110+**

### KONAMI KRAZY RACERS
**DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
**RELEASED:** 2001
**EXPECT TO PAY:**
EUROPE **£15+**, USA: **£45+**, JAPAN: **£35+**

### THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE MINISH CAP
**DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM/FLAGSHIP
**RELEASED:** 2004
**EXPECT TO PAY:**
EUROPE **£70+**, USA: **£45+**, JAPAN: **£80+**

### DRILL DOZER
**DEVELOPER:** GAME FREAK
**RELEASED:** 2005
**EXPECT TO PAY:**
USA: **£110+**, JAPAN: **£100+**

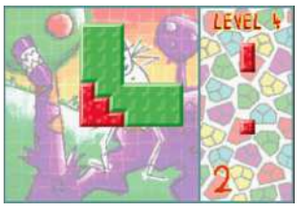
RAREWARE + UNDERWEAR =

# IT'S MR PANTS

EXPECT TO PAY £5+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £15+ USA

**DEVELOPER:** RARE
**RELEASE:** 2004




» [GBA] Artists at Rare reportedly drew all the *It's Mr Pants* art left-handed to give it a childlike style.

■ Rare made a total of seven games for the GBA, all released after Nintendo sold its share in the studio to Microsoft, and though many of them are more fun than *It's Mr Pants*, none of them are as interesting! This boxy puzzle game was originally announced as *Donkey Kong: Coconut Crackers* but after the sale to Microsoft, Rare sought to remove the Nintendo IP and attach a new character to the game. That's where things get weird, as Rare looked to its most obscure character of all. Mr Pants may be unknown to most, but to Nineties Rare fans he was the offbeat mascot character from the letters page of Rare's website. There can't be many games based on a hand-drawn, underwear-clad, website mascot, which makes *It's Mr Pants* one of the strangest chapters in Rare's history and a curious collectible.

WORTH A SPIN

# KURU KURU KURURIN

EXPECT TO PAY £7+ JAPAN

EXPECT TO PAY £10+ EUROPE

**DEVELOPER:** EIGHTING
**RELEASE:** 2001

» [GBA] Now here's a game that really, really deserves a Switch port.

■ This GBA launch title is still one of the defining games on the system and one of Nintendo's greatest abandoned series. The concept is brilliantly simple… you move a stick (actually the blades of a vehicle called a Helirin) around a maze and guide it to the goal, but the catch is that the stick is constantly rotating and if you hit the walls of the maze three times then it's game over. This makes *Kuru Kuru Kururin* a nerve-wracking test of dexterity, timing and patience that sounds like it should be frustrating, but in practice is utterly absorbing and thrilling to play. Only two *Kururin* sequels were ever released – one on GBA and one on GameCube – and they're both just as good as the original. But only the first got a UK release and remains quite affordable to this day, so there's no excuse not to add this excellent game to your collection.

VAMPIRE HUNTER B

# BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HAND

**DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
**RELEASE:** 2003

EXPECT TO PAY £68+ EUROPE

■ While the *Metal Gear* series never made its way to Game Boy Advance, an entirely original Hideo Kojima stealth series did find itself on the handheld, and used innovative tech to create a wholly distinct game. In *Boktai*, players control a vampire hunter called Django, who sneaks around undead tombs, a bit like Solid Snake, in order to kill zombies and capture vampires, which he drags home in a coffin! His weapon of choice is the Gun Del Sol which shoots pure sunlight and must be charged up by using the solar sensor built into the cartridge itself. Kojima's wish was that this tech would encourage more players to actually take their GBAs outside to play, a noble idea that unfortunately didn't work too well in gloomy Britain. Still, if you want a different kind of game that only exists on GBA then look no further than *Boktai*.

» [GBA] There was a fourth *Boktai* game on DS, called *Lunar Knights*, but it doesn't use a sunlight sensor.

EXPECT TO PAY £113+ USA

EXPECT TO PAY £25+ JAPAN

## SHINE ON...

Boktai's GBA sequels

### Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django

This quickly developed sequel is really just more of the same but with new weapons, scenarios and a new weapon-crafting system. The most important change is that now solar energy can also be turned into currency, so you're rewarded even more for playing outside.

### Boktai 3: Sabata's Counterattack

This Japan-only sequel was praised for its polished graphics and excellent music, added multiple endings and a customisable motorbike for travelling between stages. A fan translation is available nowadays, though of course you'll miss out on the novelty of the sun sensor by playing that way.

### MR DRILLER A

**DEVELOPER:** NAMCO
**RELEASED:** 2002
**EXPECT TO PAY:**
JAPAN: **£10+**

### WARIO LAND 4

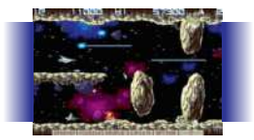
**DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO R&D1
**RELEASED:** 2001
**EXPECT TO PAY:**
EUROPE **£30+**, USA: **£110+**, JAPAN: **£35+**

### GOLDEN SUN

**DEVELOPER:** CAMELOT SOFTWARE PLANNING
**RELEASED:** 2001
**EXPECT TO PAY:**
EUROPE **£20+**, USA: **£50+**, JAPAN: **£10+**

### ASTRO BOY: OMEGA FACTOR

**DEVELOPER:** TREASURE/HITMAKER
**RELEASED:** 2003
**EXPECT TO PAY:**
EUROPE **£45+**, USA: **£70+**, JAPAN: **£35+**



### GRADIUS ADVANCE

**DEVELOPER:** MOBILE21
**RELEASED:** 2001
**EXPECT TO PAY:**
EUROPE **£50+**, USA: **£70+**, JAPAN: **£130+**

## ESSENTIAL GAME
### Ridge Racer Type 4

Remember when Xzibit used to present *Pimp My Ride*? We do, and we get the feeling that he'd put a PSone with an LCD screen in your car. He would have heard that you like cars, you see, and would have put a console in your car so you can drive while you drive. If you're going to do that, why not play *Ridge Racer Type 4*? The scenery is almost certainly more beautiful than whichever motorway gridlock you happen to actually be stuck in, and the music will soothe your road rage. Plus the racing is rather excellent.

## LCD Screen fact

■ A second 3.5mm jack located above the headphone jack allows the LCD screen to display composite video from external sources such as camcorders, video players and of course other games consoles.

# LCD Screen

» **PLATFORM:** PSone » **RELEASED:** 2001
» **COST:** £99.99 (launch), £100+ (today, boxed) £60+ (today, unboxed)

**When Sony announced that it would be refreshing the PlayStation as the smaller, cheaper PSone in the summer of 2000, an LCD screen was revealed alongside it as one of the first accessories.** Despite the early reveal and tantalising prospect of portable PlayStation action, the LCD screen actually took over a year to be released, arriving in Japan in October of 2001 before following to international markets in 2002. The regional releases of the LCD screen were of course designed to use PAL or NTSC as appropriate to the market.

The LCD screen is compact, lightweight and was of a high quality for the time, so it was more appealing for nomadic gamers than the various third-party competitors. However, the system's portability is limited by the fact that the console still requires a mains power supply to operate. Although the LCD screen doesn't require a separate power supply, it did come with a new one since the one supplied with the console wasn't designed to provide enough power to both the console and the display. The LCD screen also adds a headphone jack and has an AV multi-out port so that players can still connect the console to a TV. ✱

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**007: AGENT UNDER FIRE**
**SYSTEM:** PS2, GAMECUBE, XBOX
**YEAR:** 2001

**THE GODFATHER**
**SYSTEM:** PS3, WII, XBOX 360
**YEAR:** 2006

**DEAD SPACE (PICTURED)**
**SYSTEM:** PS3, PC, XBOX 360
**YEAR:** 2008

### BRET ROBBINS

Worked at Crystal Dynamics before joining EA Redwood Shores as one of the game's creative directors.

### ARCADIA KIM

The director of development, responsible for making sure production came together on time.

## IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- **DEVELOPER:** EA REDWOOD SHORES
- **RELEASED:** 2003
- **PLATFORM:** PS2, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** ACTION

# THE MAKING OF THE LORD OF THE RINGS THE RETURN OF THE KING™

WITH ONE SUCCESSFUL VIDEOGAME TIE-IN UNDER ITS BELT, EA QUICKLY GOT TO WORK ADAPTING THE CONCLUSION OF PETER JACKSON'S EPIC FILM TRILOGY IN STYLE WITH A SEQUEL. WITH THE PUBLISHER'S OWN REDWOOD SHORES IN THE SADDLE, HERE'S HOW IT WAS ACHIEVED

**WORDS BY AARON POTTER**

» [GameCube] Whereas *The Two Towers* saw you fight through Helm's Deep as Aragorn, Gimli or Legolas, *The Return Of The King* kicks off with Gandalf's momentous arrival.

**Due to the sheer complexity of filmmaking and an understandable (but still unprecedented) amount of secrecy, EA's first attempt at adapting *The Lord Of The Rings* trilogy into a videogame was a bit like riding on a train without the track.** Sure, the execs at production company New Line Cinema did their best to maintain a good level of communication between parties on both the movie and game sides, yet it soon became clear that early access to scripts, props and concept art still wouldn't be enough to develop a quality game in time to coincide with *The Fellowship Of The Ring's* 2001 theatrical release. How could one capture the look and tone of a cinematic Middle-earth without seeing one shred of shot film material?

Fortunately, an increased development timeline was agreed upon, which allowed Stormfront Studios – the team behind the 2002 official *The Two Towers* videogame – to gain a better understanding of Peter Jackson's vision and affectionately portray its world and characters. The result was one of the most beloved movie tie-in games ever released (you can read about it in **RG** issue 228). However, the film production horse gallops ever onward, and great critical reception and commercial success aside, EA realised it wouldn't be fair to ask Stormfront to produce equal results just a year later. The decision was made, therefore, this time for an internal studio to make a sequel that would faithfully adapt the events of *The Return Of The King*. Enter EA Redwood Shores.

The developer that would later become Visceral Studios (most famous for its *Dead Space* trilogy) already had a great track record by 2002. Beginning with cult third-person shooter *Future Cop: LAPD* for both PC and the original PlayStation in 1998, Redwood Shores slowly built up a steady stream of sports hits covering popular franchises like *Road Rash*, *NASCAR* and, perhaps most notably, the *Tiger Woods* series of annual golf games. Why, then, would EA choose it to tackle *The Return Of The King*? Well, a similarly themed gameography didn't prevent Stormfront from working wonders with its *The Two Towers* adaptation. Plus, Redwood Shores had experience overcoming the licensed game curse with *007: Agent Under Fire*. Couple this with the challenge of doing justice to the final part of what was then the most ambitious movie project ever, and for some, the prospect was all too tempting.

» [GameCube] *The Return Of The King*'s new engine meant that a greater number of enemies could appear on-screen.

> "IT WAS LIKE PULLING TOGETHER AN ALL-STAR CAST... SOME OF THE MOST LEGENDARY PEOPLE IN THE INDUSTRY"
> ARCADIA KIM

Soon enough, Electronic Arts got down to business, leveraging the existing talent present at Redwood Shores and bolstering it by poaching other great talent from across the industry. One of those enticed over was the game's creative director Bret Robbins. "I had been a designer at Crystal Dynamics for several years with a group of developers, and we had become good friends and worked well together," he recalls. "When some of them started leaving for EA, I followed suit and landed the lead design role on *The Return Of The King*." The hope was that by doing this, EA

# SHRINKING THE KING

## HOW GRIPTONITE GAMES' GBA SEQUEL RETAINED THE PORTABLE MAGIC

While the official *The Return Of The King* game on home consoles may have switched developers, EA once again tapped portable specialist Griptonite Games to handle the Game Boy Advance version. It plays and looks extremely similar to its predecessor *The Two Towers*, letting you play through the movie's events from an isometric view as a collection of heroes ranging from Gandalf to Éowyn. It stays true to the hack-and-slash roots of its bigger brother, sprinkling in more mechanics and locations to build off the previous game's simple but fun foundation. Looting, in particular, is much improved, as now not every item you find is useless seeing as they can be shared between characters.

Much like before, upgrading characters is a far deeper and thoughtful process than in the main version, as any collected item can buff stats like defence, accuracy and health. Throw in the ability to unlock combat abilities like Aragorn's Death Strike alongside a wide range of active and passive skills the more you level up, and *The Return Of The King* on Game Boy Advance is more thorough than it has any right to be. Animations still look incredibly smooth to this day, supported by an excellent chiptune soundtrack and deft use of pixel art.

Select Hero
Eowyn
owyn, niece of King Theoden of Rohan, is a strong, independent, and beautiful woman. She travels in disguise to the White City – Minas Tirith.

» [GameCube] To better evoke the idea of a fellowship and war fought on multiple fronts, the game features three distinct campaigns each centred on a different character.

» [GameCube] *The Return Of The King* upped the playable hero count from four to nine, with side characters like Pippin, Merry and Faramir unlocked after finishing the game.

could best even itself, making a better *The Lord Of The Rings* game on a tighter production schedule of just 14 months.

It didn't take long for the benefits of having an internal team handle *The Return Of The King* to come to fruition. Because while Electronic Arts previously needed a dedicated producer from its partners division acting as a liaison between itself and the studio to ensure development was running smoothly, Redwood Shores had direct access to help it make much quicker ground given the short turnaround time. Before you knew it, the aptitude behind EA's planned adaptation had just as much creative pedigree behind it as its silver-screen equivalent.

"EA was willing to shore up considerable resources and invest heavily in development talent internally to make *The Return Of The King* an extraordinary entertainment experience," says Arcadia Kim, who aided the game from the EA side as director of development. "I remember being able to assemble the cream of the crop team of engineers, artists, designers and producers from across all of the EA studios. It was like pulling together an all-star cast… some of the most legendary people in the industry. It was such an honour!"

**The ambition for *The Lord Of The Rings: The Return Of The King* was always for it to provide players with an appropriately blockbuster-style experience.** One could argue that, for as great as Stormfront's efforts was, it was somewhat hampered by its limited knowledge of how the big-screen events of *The Fellowship Of The Ring* and *The Two Towers* would appear; an unfortunate side-effect of starting development before the camera had even started rolling. EA Redwood Shores no longer had that problem, and so could build off the cinematic hack-and-slash action foundation already established.

"*The Two Towers* game provided us with a tremendous baseline for the sequel," remembers Arcadia. "With the unprecedented success of the first two movies, it was clear that our videogame was part of a very special moment in entertainment history." It helped that a significant portion of the development team from *The Two Towers* continued to work on EA's sequel. "We wanted the opportunity to pay homage to Peter Jackson's interpretation of *The Lord Of The Rings*," she continues. "We knew that we had to capitalise on the momentum of *The Two Towers* but move beyond the limits of the first game by investing in the underlying engine and technology for the franchise. The core team was excited and nervous to take on the challenge, but it fuelled our ambition."

One of the most significant ways *The Return Of The King* game would improve on its predecessor is in its increased scope. Whereas before, players were limited to playing as just Aragorn, Legolas and

# FURTHER ADVENTURES IN MIDDLE-EARTH

## THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS

**YEAR:** 2002
**SYSTEM:** PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE

The first game based on *The Lord Of The Rings* from EA heavily focused on the events of the second film. Players fight through locales like Helm's Deep, Weathertop and Moria as either Aragorn, Legolas or Gimli. *The Two Towers* very much walked so that *The Return Of The King* could run.

## THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE THIRD AGE

**YEAR:** 2004
**SYSTEM:** PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE

With no specific movie release date to hit this time, EA Redwood Shores was freed up to create an original, parallel story with new characters for its second tie-in to the hit trilogy. *The Third Age* forgoes hack-and-slash gameplay for traditional turn-based combat and heavy RPG elements.

## THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

**YEAR:** 2004
**SYSTEM:** PC

EA sought to do better justice to *The Lord Of The Rings*' iconic war-scale bouts with a real-time strategy game released exclusively for PC. It received positive reviews at launch and broke one million sales in less than a month, making it worthy of receiving a follow-up two years later.

Gimli (each with their own slightly different fighting styles and perks), Redwood Shores blew the doors wide open from a playable character perspective. The sequel would let you fight as no less than nine characters, carrying over those same three from *The Two Towers* but adding in the likes of Gandalf, Faramir and even hobbit characters like Pippin, Sam and even Frodo himself.

As you can imagine, making so many characters play differently was quite the task. And though it made sense that characters like the hobbits would share similar move sets, with less powerful melee and ranged attacks to the others, nailing an almost demigod-like character such as Gandalf required a totally different approach. As Bret explains, "A lot of effort was put into the 'feel' of each character, their combos, and their talent trees, to make them distinct." If *The Two Towers* pulled from the *Golden Axe* school of thought, with its emphasis on creating three battle-hardened heroes, Bret and his team wanted their game to almost be like *Gauntlet* by comparison. "I think we struck a good balance in the end."

Arcadia concurs that *The Return Of The King* was heavily inspired by Atari's 1985 top-down co-operative classic in terms of how its playable characters were designed. "Chris Tremmel and Bret Robbins, the co-lead designers, were both huge fans of *Gauntlet* growing up," she says. "I remember them re-enacting actual combo moves in the design room describing their vision for the feel of the play. They wanted that arcade hack-and-slash combat that felt like one-on-one action on the plains of Rohan. Their interpretation was fresh, fun, but also nostalgic at the same time." Arcadia suggests this is why the game remains so fun to play even 18 years later.

» [GameCube] Heroes in *The Return Of The King* have impressive abilities that can be activated at will, such as Gandalf's instant-killing shield orb.

» [GameCube] As well as melee and ranged attacks, characters can now interact with the environment to take down those pesky orcs.

» [GameCube] Sam's fight against Shelob in her lair is greatly expanded upon in EA's game, seeing Frodo's former gardener contend with multiple spider babies as well as the queen herself in a boss battle.

> "CHRIS TREMMEL AND BRET ROBBINS, THE CO-LEAD DESIGNERS, WERE BOTH HUGE FANS OF GAUNTLET GROWING UP"
> ARCADIA KIM

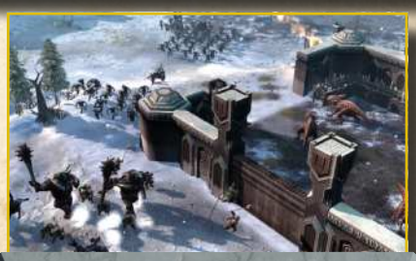
***The Return Of The King* kept the basic bones of its precursor, letting players battle it out across the events of the movie, beginning where the last game left off during the battle of Helm's Deep all the way up to the moment where Frodo is forced to fight his urges not to throw the ring into Mount Doom.** Your action skills would once again be graded from 'Fair' to 'Perfect' depending on how well you landed combos and parried incoming attacks. The better your performance, the more XP you would gain to pour into new skills for each specific hero. This time, however, in the effort to strengthen this idea of a fellowship, players could also invest XP into certain enhancements that could be shared across various characters – saving you time grinding in the process. New contextual moves, like spear-throwing and fire-spreading, also gave you more reasons to interact with the game's incredibly realistic environments.

## EA MADE THE MOST OF ITS HANDLING OF THE LOTR MOVIE LICENCE, EXPANDING ON THE UNIVERSE USING VARIOUS GENRES IN THE NOUGHTIES

### THE LORD OF THE RINGS: TACTICS

**YEAR:** 2005
**SYSTEM:** PSP

EA took a chance on Sony's handheld in 2005, with an exclusive tactical grid-based game that recreated the movie trilogy's events. You command characters on both the good and bad side from a top-down perspective on the battlefield, trapping and dispatching enemy units in order to progress.



### THE LORD OF THE RINGS: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II

**YEAR:** 2006
**SYSTEM:** PC, XBOX 360

Players on PC once again got to build up their base and manage various different unit types in this RTS sequel that focused on grand battles between an elf/dwarf alliance and Sauron's evil forces in the north. Its *Rise Of The Witch King* expansion was also highly regarded and the sequel also made it to Xbox 360.

### THE LORD OF THE RINGS: CONQUEST

**YEAR:** 2009
**SYSTEM:** PC, PS3, XBOX 360

Having had great success with its *Star Wars: Battlefront* series, EA wanted to replicate its success by bringing the troop-based battlefield action to *The Lord Of The Rings: Conquest* let you play as a number of classes in two campaigns – you could murder hobbits and even play as the Balrog itself.

# PRECIOUS BONUS CONTENT

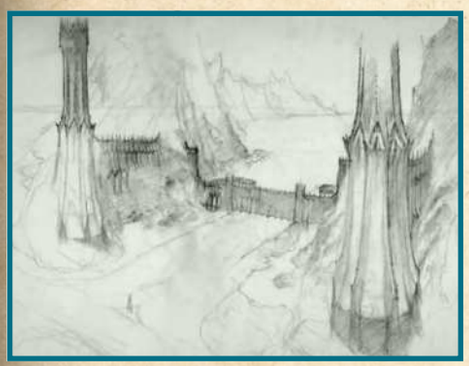
## EA WASN'T SHY ABOUT GRANTING PLAYERS BEHIND-THE-SCENES ACCESS

More so than other movie tie-in games at the time, Redwood Shores gave *The Lord Of The Rings* fans unprecedented access to bonus materials that revealed more about the making of both the game and film. Behind-the-scenes interviews, concept art and other extra bits aren't hiding deep in sub-menus, either, but are instead built into the body of the level path. You unlock more 'Making Of' content the further into the three campaigns you progress, gaining further insight into how EA attempted to create a playable blockbuster experience worthy of Tolkien's text and Jackson's cinematic vision.

Hearing legendary thespians like Ian McKellen and Christopher Lee speak of their enthusiasm about giving players a way to take part in the movie is a surreal yet special treat. Unsurprisingly, it's a part of the development process those who worked on *The Return Of The King* think back on fondly. "The most memorable experiences were, of course, working with the actors doing the actual voiceovers," recalls Arcadia. "I remember Elijah Wood being quite an avid gamer! We would send him pre-beta versions of the game and his input proved to be very invaluable in tuning the characters' responses."

Much of this bonus material remains exclusive to EA's game to this day, as it isn't included in the various film re-releases across DVD and Blu-ray. Its inclusion was just another way for EA to show players that its movie tie-in wasn't just another rushed cash-grab, and was instead something made with care.

» [GameCube] Whereas *The Two Towers* found multiple excuses to split Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli up, two-player co-op here means they get to stay together.



» [GameCube] EA Redwood Shores had unrestricted access to a lot of movie materials, including proposed sketches and concept art.

The sequel's increased ambition and scope were undeniable. You could now take on the role of more heroes from the film, sure, but each now had their own character-specific levels, too. By splitting *The Return Of The King*'s campaign into essentially three strands, focusing on the path of the 'Wizard', 'Hobbits' and 'King', no longer did players have to miss out on events that took place in tandem. Aragorn's quest takes him, Legolas and Gimli to the White Mountains as they try to win over the army of the dead's support in the final battle. Sam and Frodo are led from Osgiliath to Mordor by Gollum. Meanwhile, Gandalf attempts to rally Gondor's troops amidst several set piece battles.

The direction of all three paths may have been determined by the movie's script, and by definition Tolkien's book, but that didn't stop Redwood Shores from wanting to fill in some gaps via fun gameplay sequences. "The challenge was honing in on the essence of each of the battles," Arcadia reveals. "We used to talk about how our job was to reach between the movie frames and expand the action. We wanted people to watch the movie in the theatre and then give them the opportunity to do just that! What would that feel like to be inside that skirmish? That was our mission to bring the film to interactive life."

**The studio did so by recreating some of *The Return Of The King*'s most memorable sequences, expanding upon familiar locations like Pelennor Fields and Shelob's Lair in ways a film just can't – even with an epic 201-minute runtime.** The fact that all three paths could be tackled in any order helped prevent locations from feeling repetitive, too, as players are challenged with battling wave upon wave of near-endless orcs and Uruk-hai. Redwood Shores was able to capture the movie's epic scale thanks to smart technical workarounds, building off the sprite-based visuals implemented in *The Two Towers* to make enemies in the distance seem imposing, while making use of a fixed constrained camera which Bret suggests "helped to focus the player on what we wanted them to see".

Of course, another big way Redwood Shores' translation of the film separated itself from what had come before was the addition of co-op. True, it meant that levels would have to be designed larger so as to accommodate two people, but it was worth it knowing it would mark the first time you and a friend could fight side by side in Peter Jackson's universe together. It made so much sense that co-op's inclusion was decided very early on

» [GameCube] The raid of Minas Tirith mimics the Helm's Deep level from *The Two Towers* in which you must repel orcs and Uruk-hai while kicking down ladders.

» [PS2] All of the unlockable skills are given an appropriately epic name, such as Frodo's 'Final Judgement' manoeuvre.

» [PS2] As expected, Legolas is faster on the bow than almost any other character – and devastating when his arrows are fully upgraded.

» [PC] Unlike the trolls Bilbo encountered in *The Hobbit*, Sauron's Olog-hai do not turn to stone in sunlight.

in development, especially since it fell perfectly in line with the game's bigger scope of being a true blockbuster, all while tapping into the idea of a fellowship working together to ultimately overcome the threat of Sauron.

"Tolkien's work always has an underlying theme of teamwork persevering over a singular evil," Arcadia explains. "We wanted to portray that idea through the gameplay. When we had the opportunity to rebuild the *Return Of The King* [engine] from the ground up, we built a fully featured two-player experience." Such a massive change wasn't without its obstacles, though. "Co-op introduces many design challenges of how two players can move independently but still work together as a team," she continues. "We wanted that exploratory element in the map design and the missions. Middle-earth is sprawling, and the gameplay needed to reflect that. Again, these design challenges are what brought this innovation play."

> "THE RELEASE OF THE RETURN OF THE KING WAS A MOMENT IN CINEMATIC HISTORY THAT RIVALS STAR WARS AND MARVEL OF OUR TIME"
> ARCADIA KIM

**Though Orlando Bloom may be strangely absent from the game's credits in his role as Legolas, most of the movie's cast reprised their roles to voice all-new dialogue to help neatly join the game-specific sequences up with clips from the movie.** EA's *The Two Towers* game was already notable for being extremely authentic, but by nature of featuring more locations to roam, more characters to visit and more bonus content to unlock, *The Return Of The King* kicked it up a notch. You'd expect nothing less considering the close communication both EA and Redwood Shores had with Peter Jackson's crew.

"They were incredibly helpful," Bret reveals, when it comes to translating Viggo Mortensen, Ian McKellen and the other actors' actions in-game. "We actually used some of their stunt people and motion-captured their fighting styles. We had props from the movie scattered around the office. We obviously also needed to have the script way ahead of time, so that was extremely helpful. If I recall, Peter also would occasionally email us with updates and thoughts on the game."

Almost every aspect of the game needed approval from New Line, but considering EA's previous track record, it was hardly ever an issue for Redwood Shores. The goal was to make *The Return Of The King*'s development an orderly process, specifically since the game had a hard 3 November 2003, release date – well over a month before the movie's debut on cinema screens. Releasing so soon enabled New Line and EA to capitalise on the ever-increasing audience hype, even if such a prospect is unfathomable today due to modern spoiler culture. "For *The Lord Of The Rings* franchise, we were trying to do simultaneous synchronised launches with the movie release," Arcadia recalls. "This was a production conundrum working with [special effects vendor] Weta, New Line and Peter Jackson, but I think we conquered it!"

*The Lord Of The Rings: The Return Of The King* officially launched on PC, PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube in early November, quickly earning praise for just how well it managed to improve upon the structural and mechanical aspects of *The Two Towers*, while maintaining the look, feel and climactic spirit at the heart of Jackson's 11-time Oscar-winning movie. Just like Frodo's effort to destroy the One Ring, EA and Redwood Shores had pulled off the impossible. Both hack-and-slashers have gone on to be widely considered among the best film-licensed videogames of all time. It's no wonder, then, why there are constant calls by fans of the games to return in some fashion – via a remake or otherwise.

The film trilogy may have been completed, but it far from marked the end of Electronic Arts' involvement with the franchise. It would go on to further flesh out Middle-earth with almost a decade's worth of other games focused on original characters and events. Much like how New Line Cinema took a big risk greenlighting Jackson's ambitious cinematic plan way back in 1997, EA also gambled on *The Lord Of The Rings*' success in the hopes that players would enjoy the world enough to want to inhabit and interact with it. Luckily, they did, and it was a sentiment started with *The Two Towers* but ultimately capitalised on by *The Return Of The King* the following year.

"The release of *The Return Of The King* was a moment in cinematic history that rivals *Star Wars* and Marvel of our time," recalls Arcadia, reflecting back on the exciting experience. "Our part in that moment was about honouring the franchise and building an entertainment experience to complement it. It's such a pleasure to know that it can stand the test of time." ✱

HIGH SCORE
41200
SCORE
38500
200

# Super Mario 64 DS

## COME FOR MARIO, STAY FOR THE MINIGAMES

» DS » 2004 » NINTENDO EAD

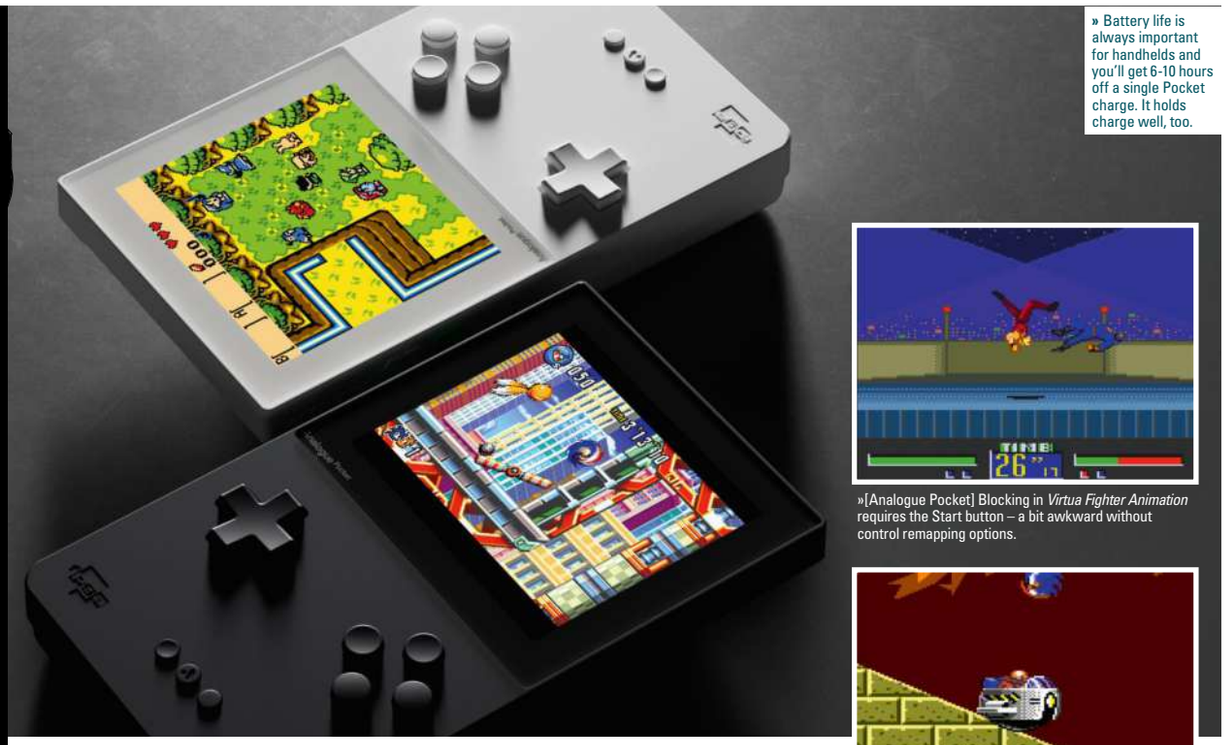
**I've mentioned before that I was an early adopter of the DS, picking up a US model on launch day.** When I ordered my system along with *Feel The Magic XY/XX*, *Super Mario 64 DS*, *Spider-Man 2* and *Metroid Prime Hunters: First Hunt* (which was included as a pack-in game) I predicted I would spend most of my time playing *Super Mario 64 DS*. While I was correct, it wasn't Mario's main adventure that actually kept my attention.

Granted, *Super Mario 64* is a fantastic game and the ability to play as Mario's mates and run around the castle using your thumb to control the on-screen action certainly felt novel, but it was the included Rec Room where I spent the vast majority of my playing time. Initially only eight games are available (two each for Mario, Luigi, Yoshi and Wario) but more can be unlocked by catching the rabbits scattered around the game world and there's a lot of variety across the 36 available games.

As you'd expect, many of the included games are designed to highlight the unique capabilities of the DS and they range from the dull (Luigi's Pair-A-Gone) to the maddeningly addictive (Yoshi's Wanted). My favourite however is Wario's Bob-omb Squad which gives you a catapult and requires you to knock out the cute little critters before they destroy the four flowers in your garden. It starts off relatively easy with Bob-ombs slowly dropping downwards at a leisurely pace, but it's not long before the action ramps up and you start to become overwhelmed.

Luckily there's some great scoring mechanics, and if you're patient you can typically smash a bunch of Bob-ombs together for huge points. Alternatively, you can blast the Lakitu which occasionally appears near the top of the screen, which causes all on-screen Bob-ombs to disappear (this nets far fewer points, though). I've never completed *Super Mario 64 DS* but my, you should see my Bob-omb Squad score, it's absolutely insane. *

>> This month we put Analogue's latest system through its paces, try out a selection of new Evercade cartridges and give you the lowdown on a brand-new Lemmings documentary



» Battery life is always important for handhelds and you'll get 6-10 hours off a single Pocket charge. It holds charge well, too.



»[Analogue Pocket] Blocking in *Virtua Fighter Animation* requires the Start button – a bit awkward without control remapping options.

»[Analogue Pocket] This shot is literally only here so we can flex on people who find this boss too hard.

# Analogue Pocket

## A MONSTER IN YOUR POCKET

**INFORMATION**

- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** $219.99
- **PUBLISHER:** ANALOGUE
- **WEBSITE:** ANALOGUE.CO

**We've been waiting for the Analogue Pocket for what feels like forever – it was over two years ago that it was first revealed, after all.** Analogue's consoles have historically been worth the wait though, and our patience has been rewarded once again. At its most basic, the device is an exceptional way to experience the libraries of the Game Boy family of consoles, and with the add-on items it becomes rather more than that.

The Analogue Pocket comes in black or white and resembles the original Game Boy in design, with some extra face buttons and shoulder buttons on either side of the cartridge port. Power is supplied via an internal battery charged via USB-C, and along side that port on the bottom of the unit you'll find a 3.5mm headphone jack and a port for a Game Boy Advance link cable. This works both with other Pockets and original Game Boy family hardware, though adapters may be needed with certain models.

As with other Analogue consoles, the Pocket mimics original hardware via FPGA (Field-Programmable Gate Array) chips, allowing for high accuracy, low latency and the ability to interface directly with hardware. That means that the Pocket runs Game Boy, Game Boy Color and Game Boy Advance games exactly as you'd expect them to run – we experienced no differences or defects with any of the games we tried with the console. The only caveat is that you may well need to give them a good cleaning, as dirty cartridge contacts will throw up errors. Your trusty old saves will work fine once the games are running though, and the Pocket will save back to the cartridge. There's even a great high-quality audio mode for GBA games. By holding the Analogue button and pressing up, you can create save states that can be loaded by holding the Analogue button and pressing down.

What really makes the machine stand out is its 3.5-inch LCD display, with an astonishing 1600x1440 resolution – ten times that of an original Game Boy. This is a larger display than the original systems, and the high pixel density allows for the convincing simulation of each system's original display

»The new dock is rather stylish and allows you to output to your TV at 1080p. It features some solid scaling options as well.

»We received a number of extras for the Pocket, although the Lynx, PC Engine and Neo Geo Pocket adaptors aren't available yet.

**BRIEF HISTORY**

» Analogue is a manufacturer of high-end retro consoles and it originally got into the market with the Omega, a consolised Neo Geo MVS. Since the NES compatible Analogue Nt Mini in 2017, the company has used FPGA-based designs with cores by Kevin 'Kevtris' Horton. The company moved to more affordable designs with the Super Nt in 2018 and Mega Sg in 2019. The Pocket was announced in 2019 and appeared on the cover of **Retro Gamer** issue 201, and is the first product to use Analogue OS. The company's next console will be the Duo, supporting PC Engine HuCards and CDs.

## ★PICKS OF THE MONTH

### DARRAN

**Evercade: Intellivision Collection 1**

I never owned this system as a youngster, so it has been interesting discovering new games.

### NICK

**Evercade: Gaelco Arcade 1**

There's some delightfully odd games on this collection and I've really enjoyed playing them.

»[Analogue Pocket] No matter what special effects we threw at the Pocket, everything was handled perfectly.

»[Analogue Pocket] The menu system is typically Analogue – clean, clear and minimalist.

»[Analogue Pocket] The original display modes look amazing – this looks just like a backlit Game Boy screen.

»[Analogue Pocket] Our old *Pokémon: LeafGreen* save file loaded up fine, allowing us to take on the Elite Four immediately.

characteristics, such as visible gaps between pixels. You can adjust these original display modes to create a more ideal version of your favourite system's display, or of course use a mode that's more like what you'd normally see from a software emulator.

There are a couple of additional features included in the Analogue Pocket which will be of interest to creative types. The console has the ability to play GB Studio games saved as .pocket files, which makes it quite a useful tool for testing prototypes during development. The console also includes the music creation tool Nanoloop 2.8 Pocket Edition, and can be integrated into your setup with Pocket to analogue sync, MIDI-in or MIDI USB-A cables ($19.99 each).

A variety of cartridge adapters have been promised for the console including Neo Geo Pocket, Lynx and PC Engine, but only the Game Gear version is available at present, for $29.99. The Pocket handles Sega games just as well as the Game Boy games, with another very authentic display mode. The adapter does detract from the elegance of the hardware due to the way the cartridge pokes past the top of the console's body, but it can't really be helped unfortunately.

The Analogue Dock ($99.99) charges the console, and adds TV output up to 1080p via HDMI as well as support for USB and Bluetooth controllers. While the excellent original display modes aren't available through the TV output, you do get the robust scaling options that Analogue usually offers. Apart from the *Tetris* screenshot we took with a camera, all of our screenshots here came via the Analogue Dock. Connecting controllers was very easy and we were playing on the TV in no time.

This is where we encountered our only real complaint with the Analogue Pocket. Whether you're playing docked or handheld, you currently have very little choice over your control assignments, which made it quite awkward to play certain games which demand quick access to the Start button. Analogue has specified that full control mapping is coming in a future firmware update, and to its credit the process of updating the firmware is very easy – you just put the update file in the root directory of a micro SD card, insert that card into the machine and turn it on. Updating the Dock is similarly easy, using a USB memory stick instead.

That's not the only feature yet to be implemented – the Library and Memories options on the minimalist menu system are currently greyed out, set to be included in the 1.1 firmware. Likewise, it's not yet possible to use the second FPGA chip to add extra console implementations. It's a brilliant piece of hardware even without these features, but you'll need to wait if they're important to you. Then again, you'll probably need to wait anyway. Global component shortages mean that Pocket orders placed now aren't due to ship until 2023, so if you're yet to order then there's every chance that these features will be up and running by the time you get your machine. ✱

## In a nutshell

**No matter which of the supported platforms you're playing, the Analogue Pocket represents the best way to play them today. You might find yourself frustrated by the lengthy order backlog, but it's definitely worth the wait.**

»[Analogue Pocket] Original Game Boy games can have a variety of colour palettes applied.

»[Analogue Pocket] The proper vertical console design made us very nostalgic when revisiting old favourites like *Street Fighter Alpha*.

»[Analogue Pocket] As always, the system supports original cartridges, so you'll need to seek out those expensive games for real.

## PICK OF THE MONTH

# Evercade Multi Game Cartridges

» **System:** Evercade » **Buy it from:** Online, retail » **Buy it for:** £17.99

**Blaze's addition of arcade cartridges to the Evercade range has been a really positive step, and we've been eagerly awaiting getting our hands on the Gaelco and Atari collections after great experiences with the Technos and Data East cartridges.**

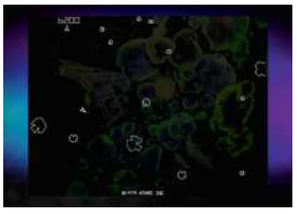
Despite not being the best-known developer, Spanish arcade manufacturer Gaelco put out some great games in the Nineties and its collection is an absolute delight. *World Rally* is an excellent racing game that will delight fans of the *Drift Out* series, and *Alligator Hunt* is a great action game in the tradition of *Cabal* and *Wild Guns*. *Biomechanical Toy* and *Thunder Hoop* are both run-and-gun platformers, with the former being the more fast-paced and visually impressive of the two. *Glass* is a decent arena shooter, though the nudity of the arcade original has understandably been censored. *Snowboard Championship* is the game we had the least fun with, mostly because *World Rally* is similar but feels better. None of these games have ever been released for a home console before, which makes the whole package even better.

Retro Gamer Stocker

» Score **90%**

Atari's collection features 13 games from the Seventies and Eighties. While a couple of the games do feel very simplistic today, such as *Pong* and *Night Driver*, there are still plenty of highlights here. *Centipede*, *Crystal Castles*, *Lunar Lander* and *Missile Command* all hold up pretty nicely, and even less celebrated games like *Liberator* and *Sky Diver* are good fun. If you've bought an Evercade VS, *Warlords* is a particular highlight as it's a fantastic four-player game for your library. One unfortunate aspect of the collection that can't really be helped is that many of the games originally used trackball or paddle controls, and while the d-pad controls are fine they're not ideal. It's also worth noting that seven of the games here have previously appeared on the Evercade in their home console forms, so if you already own the previous two Atari collections this may feel a little like retreading old ground.

» Score **78%**



»[Evercade] *Asteroids Deluxe* appears to be the original *Asteroids* on *Deluxe*'s background, which seems rather weird.

»[Evercade] *Alligator Hunt* looks fantastic, plays really well and stars a skateboarding kid. What more could you ask for?

## The Little Book Of Sound Chips: Volume 1: 1977-1981

» **Buy it from:** Fusionretrobooks.com
» **Buy it for:** £14.99 (£9.99 Kindle)

**The latest project from Chris Abbott and Andrew Laggan is ideal for anyone with a passing interest in the sound capabilities of 8-bit consoles and home computers as well as the arcade games that were so prominent during the era.** It features a number of interesting and often tech-focused interviews and effortlessly highlights just how difficult it was to create memorable tunes on these systems. A large number of games are featured and you can listen to their best tracks by scanning the included QR code. It's a neat idea, allowing you to enjoy the book in a new way. It's not the deepest of reads, but it's packed with plenty of interesting facts and is very fairly priced.

**DARRAN JONES**

## Clockwork Aquario

» **System:** Switch (tested), PS4
» **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £16.99

**It's remarkable that this platform game even exists.** *Wonder Boy* developer Westone cancelled it after some unsuccessful location tests at arcades in 1993, and the game has had to be restored from incomplete source material. You can feel that this has been a real labour of love – there's a nice art gallery, good CRT filter options, a remixed soundtrack and even unlockable dip switch options. The game itself is competent with satisfying grab and throw combat, and it features some truly beautiful pixel art. However, it really lacks the kind of memorable set pieces that set the best games apart from the competition. Unlocking infinite credits requires you to complete the game – you get three, five or nine – but it's at least a very fair challenge for an arcade game.

**NICK THORPE**

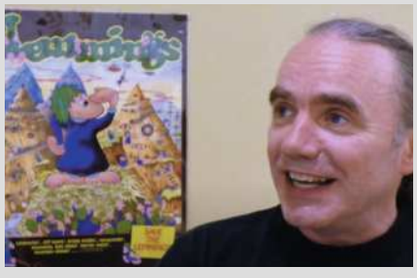
» Score **74%**

## Lemmings: Can You Dig it?

» **Buy it from:** bit.ly/doclemmings
» **Buy it for:** Free

**It's easy to forget the impact that *Lemmings* made when it first appeared on computer screens in 1991.** Fortunately, Richard Wilcox, the director and editor of *Can You Dig it?* remembers all too well and, along with producers Jamie Wotton and Stuart O'Brien, has assembled virtually all the original *Lemmings* team to discuss the creation of this seminal game. *Can You Dig It?* not only examines the origins of *Lemmings*, but also the birth of DMA Design and *Lemmings*' own legacy, including its links to the *GTA* series. Filmed during the pandemic, its production does suffer at times, but it still offers a truly fascinating look behind the scenes, even without the involvement of David Jones. It's also notable for featuring some interesting input from the late Ian Hetherington. *Lemmings* fans will love it.

**DARRAN JONES**



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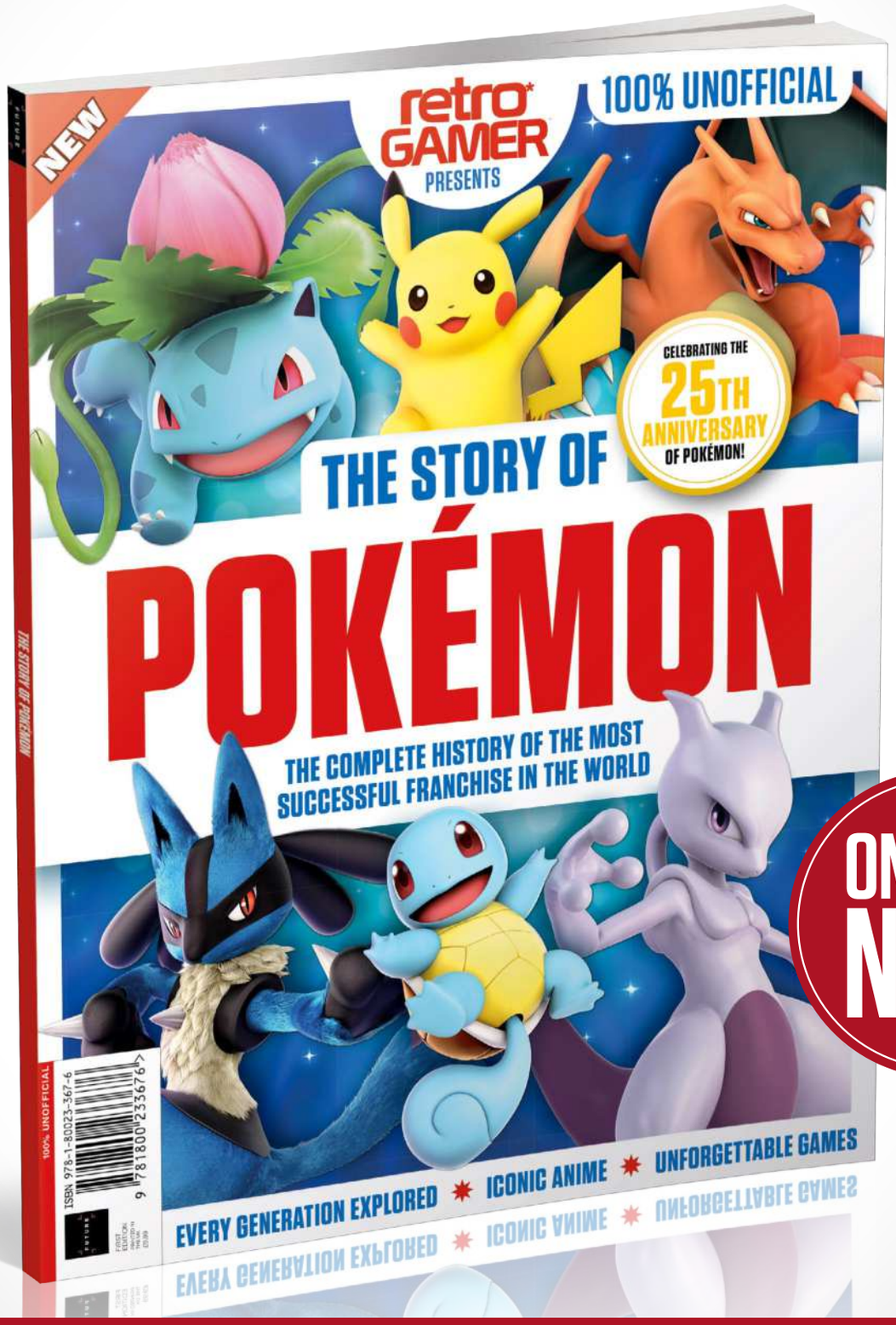
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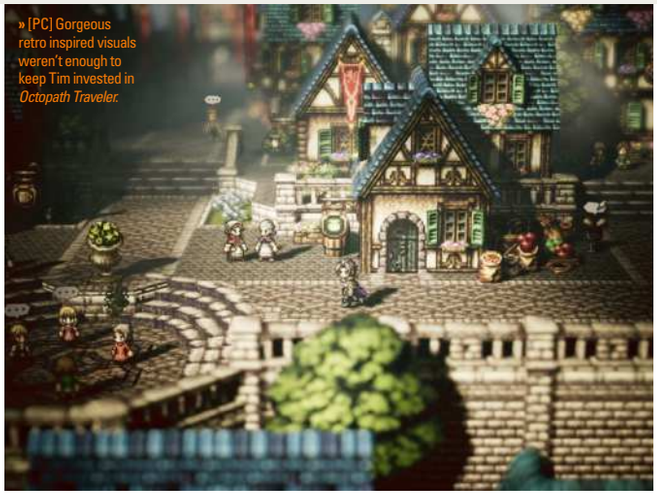
# HOT TOPIC

**RETROBATES** MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES



» [PC] Gorgeous retro inspired visuals weren't enough to keep Tim invested in *Octopath Traveler*.

» [PS3] This was what Nick expected from *Sonic Unleashed*. He still wishes he'd got it.

# DOWNERS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

## We discuss the games that built us up and let us down

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

**Whether there's a big hype campaign for a game or you just find yourself personally invested in it, there are plenty of times when you'll find yourself eagerly awaiting a forthcoming release.** Plenty of times, that's just fine – but there are inevitably going to be times when a game doesn't live up to your expectations. With that in mind, we got together to discuss some of our biggest letdowns, from huge ones to weirdly personal ones.

**NICK**
Have you ever been totally suckered in by the hype for a game, only to be disappointed when it finally arrived?

» [N64] Believe it or not, this is a video of *Turok 2* in high-resolution mode. The framerate is just that low.

**DARRAN**
Many times. One of my biggest was *Out Run* on the Amstrad CPC 464. I got it for Christmas Day and it was so utterly appalling that I'm pretty sure I started crying.

**TIM**
I remember seeing *Rise Of The Robots* on *Gamesmaster* or *Bad Influence* and being totally blown away by the graphics. Fighting games had never looked so good! And then I played it. Oof.

**DARRAN**
*Rise Of The Robots* was bloody terrible. It looked so good in stills and fell apart when moving. Just like *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*.

**NICK**
For me it was a different kind of robot combat – I got *Robot Wars* for the Game Boy Color for Christmas one year, because I loved the show. The game was basically two sprites rubbing up against each other with all the crunching impact of a marshmallow being dropped on a bouncy castle.

**DARRAN**
I've got another doozy that's just popped into my head. *The Apprentice* was a budget game by Mastertronic and I picked it up because it had an amazing front cover. When I got home the game itself was bloody terrible. Like books, you should never judge games by their covers, either.

**TIM**
I was totally let down by *The Bouncer* on PS2. Again it looked nice but was an absolute slog to play. (Though I did finish it three times, thankfully it's quite short.)

**DARRAN**
Why did you finish it three times?

**TIM**
I think it was because there were three main characters and you unlocked stuff if you did. It has been quite a while.

**DARRAN**
Ah that makes sense. Also, if this is about gaming disappointments, shouldn't it be an entire spread of Nick talking about *Sonic The Hedgehog* games?

**TIM**
Although, surely there must be one you hate Nick?

**NICK**
Ah, but I've learned not to get hyped for *Sonic* games! Well, except for *Sonic Generations* and *Sonic Mania*, but they turned out good. The last one I was genuinely excited for that truly let me down was *Sonic Unleashed*.

> "Rise Of The Robots was bloody terrible. It looked so good in stills and fell apart when moving"
> **DARRAN JONES**

**DARRAN**
And why was that a letdown?

**NICK**
The marketing focused on all of the fun daytime platforming stages, so I thought the Werehog beat-'em-up stuff might be confined to relatively brief sections. Instead, it turned out to make up way more of the play time than the good bits.

**DARRAN**
That makes sense. One of the big things that disappointed me was the release of the N64's Expansion Pak. I remember all the N64 mags raving about it at the time, particularly for *Turok 2*, but when I got it I was shocked by the often poor framerates that these high-res modes used and none of the mags of the time mentioned it.

## Follow us online so that you can join in the discussions

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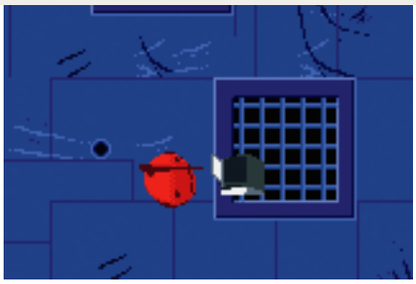


» [Game Boy Color] Even *Battle Construction Vehicles* has more graceful mechanical combat than *Robot Wars*.

» [Xbox 360] *Too Human* started out on the PlayStation, and apparently its game design just never evolved beyond that point.

» [PS4] Nick was genuinely excited about the return of *Fear Effect*, and now he's not sure why.

» [Amstrad CPC] We can only imagine how excited poor old Darran was, looking at this loading screen with anticipation.

**TIM**
That sucks. You know what else sucks? *Too Human*. *Eternal Darkness* was amazing and then Silicon Knights released the abysmal *Too Human*. And then I had to review the damned thing.

**DARRAN**
Wasn't that beset by loads of issues during production, just like *Eternal Darkness* was?

**NICK**
It was originally going to be a GameCube game, wasn't it?

**TIM**
Well actually… it was first announced in 1999 and was going to be released on PlayStation.

**DARRAN**
Woah! It's not often Nickipedia gets schooled. Good work, Tim. Are there any recent games that have disappointed either of you?

**NICK**
It's a few years old now, but *Fear Effect Sedna* really bummed me out. I really liked the PlayStation games, so a total change of genre wasn't to my liking in the first place, but then it turned out to be rubbish too.

**TIM**
I was looking forward to *Crackdown 3*, but it didn't seem to improve on anything and felt worse than the first two games.

**DARRAN**
I've been playing *Jurassic Park: The Game*. I was really looking forward to it, even though I knew it was not supposed to be very good. It turns out all those reviews are right. The only neat thing is that the story runs alongside the plot of the original film, so it's a great slice of dino action if you love the franchise like I do. It's still deeply average, though.

**NICK**
Actually, there's a disappointment from something that never happened – I liked *The Lost World* in the arcade, but the game that came out on PlayStation and Saturn wasn't a conversion.

**DARRAN**
See, I quite liked that, but you got to control a dinosaur. In fact, I might try and get the Saturn version.

**TIM**
*Octopath Traveler* didn't scratch my JRPG itch. And *Phoenix Point* didn't pop my *XCOM* boil.

**DARRAN**
I've heard middling stuff from *Phoenix Point*, which surprises me, as it's Julian Gollop and he knows his onions when it comes to strategy RPGs.

**TIM**
Which is why I was hoping to enjoy it, but alas, no.

**DARRAN**
So what was the last game you bought that disappointed you?

**TIM**
Me? Buy games? OK, *Guardians Of The Galaxy* was the last game I bought, but it's good. So maybe *Curse Of The Dead Gods* – mostly because it popped up on Game Pass about a week after I bought it. I hate it when that happens.

**NICK**
*Disaster Report 4: Summer Memories*. I think it probably would have been impossible to live up to my expectations after it spent nearly a decade in development heck, but the technical performance was awful and the game just wasn't as good as *Raw Danger*.

**DARRAN**
For me it's probably the latest Toaplan collection by M2. It's a solid collection of shooters, but I'd have rather had all the games in the *Tiger Heli* series rather than the first two arcade games and their various console conversions. ✱

# READERS REACT

## What games were you disappointed by?

**Samantha Ferreira**
*Zelda: The Wind Waker*. I was all hyped to explore the world; visually, it looked great, and every feature sounded stellar. Then I played it, and the sailing was tedious, and the latter game was basically a giant series of fetch quests and currency sinks. I tuned out and gave up.

**Graham Plowman**
*Beyond Divinity* on the PC. I loved *Divine Divinity* before it, a real sleeper hit, but the sequel failed to live up to expectations for me, and I never finished it. Still, Larian Studios then went on to greater things…

**John 'Snagultoof' Davies**
I enjoyed *Arcadia* on the Spectrum so I was really looking forward to *Schizoids* by Imagine when it came out, based entirely on the advert and inlay cover. It wasn't a very good game at all to put it mildly.

**Mark Page**
*Sega Touring Car Championship* on the Saturn. Being late in the Saturn's life I was hyped for this and it seemed a lot of the Sega mags were too. Sadly, it was a crushing disappointment. Graphically, it's a mess with warping all over the place and an abysmal framerate making it look worse than other titles on the system.

**James**
*Stuntman*. It left me thinking, what kind of film crew would set up expensive shoots and expect a driver to do the whole scene in ONE TAKE with no practice runs or a proper brief? Frustrating is being kind. It was so hyped and it looked great. Such a good premise for a game.

**John Ebbs**
*Impossible Mission 2* on the C64 – 96% in *Zzap!64*. Multiload, some rooms where you have to die to get out of them, and the puzzle part was not a patch on the original.

**ZenoEvil – Meaning Machines**
*Alex Kidd: The Lost Stars*, which at the time I took to be a sequel to *Miracle World*, although now appreciate that isn't quite right. Talking of which, why on earth didn't they ever make a Master System sequel to *Miracle World*? [Agreed, it makes no sense - Ed]

**Steven Noad**
Controversial one this perhaps, but for me it's *Final Fantasy VII* on PS1. Magazines were raving about it and it looked good, but upon playing it I found it boring and it did nothing for me.

**NukePoweredToaster**
*Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*. The best way to fathom this is to consider a world where *Game Of Thrones* was followed up by a spin-off on PBS Kids. And even with the junk story aside, the judges were a truly horrid game mechanic. Who wants walls in their customisation sandbox?

**Dave Tucker**
Not sure many will agree, but I was really disappointed in *Rainbow Islands*. *Bubble Bobble* was one of my absolute favourites and all the reviews said *Rainbow Islands* was even better. It wasn't.

# COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

**SAMURAI SHODOWN**

I ordered this as soon as they were announced from Pix N Love, a fantastic low-print publisher from France. Who could pass up these collector's editions in original Neo Geo Shock Boxes?

PAID: £85 (EACH)

**NES SIGNED BY MASAYUKI UEMURA**

I bought my NES from a friend in the Nineties. A few years ago, I had the pleasure of photographing Masayuki Uemura, the designer of the NES hardware, for **Retro Gamer** 155 and he signed the box for me.

PAID: £10

## BIO

**NAME:**
Matt Taylor

**LOCATION:**
Nottingham

**FAVOURITE GAME:**
Shinobi (arcade)

**FAVOURITE SYSTEM:**
SNES

**COLLECTION WORTH:**
£12,000-£15,000

# BOXING CLEVER

## Here's a collector who wants to get physical

**It seems FOMO, the 'fear of missing out' phenomenon which apparently grips the social media obsessed youth of today, has now entered the retro world.** "The collecting game has changed," Matt Taylor assures us. "In the past, a console would die and you'd pick up games for it dirt cheap. I have PlayStation stuff I paid pounds for which is now worth hundreds but you can't do that now. There are limited physical releases and if you don't get them immediately, you won't ever get them. Or else you'll have to spend well over the odds – in months, they are fetching triple the original price. I'm getting my games at the cheapest possible price… but that isn't cheap either!"

As we survey the walls of Matt's marvellous games room, a lockdown project that has now become his 'happy place', we are dazzled by the sheer volume of boxed games he has accumulated. Row upon row of immaculate Super Famicom and GameCube releases are joined by more modern games for the WiiU and Switch, the latter being his latest obsession. Given that many of these newer titles can be bought more cheaply as digital downloads, when did this need to own the actual physical cartridge or disc take hold?

"Like most collectors, it wasn't done consciously," he explains. "I just started buying games in the Nineties and then never sold them. Weirdly, I did think even back then that Nintendo stuff would be worth something in the future. Mario would be like Mickey Mouse and therefore it would be valuable… but that nothing else would!"

Matt was half-right. He hung on to most of his Nintendo purchases but he now regrets selling off the bulk of his Sega collection over the years, a fact he cannot ignore due to his own fastidiousness. "I love my collection and have a connection to it," says Matt, "so everything I ever sold on eBay, I've kept the photos and logged the sale. The other day I looked at the Saturn stuff I'd sold, like *Darius 2*, *Darius Gaiden*, *Guardian Heroes*… I now wish I hadn't kept a record as it hurts." [That would pretty much kill me – Ed]

He admits to selling mint copies of *Metroid* and *Castlevania 3* for the NES for a tidy £250 each and even offloaded an original *Space Invaders* cabinet to the National Videogame Museum, though he did put some of the proceeds to good use in creating the games room we now sit in. "I see lots of game rooms online and they feel a bit like a headache, like a shop with things crammed in everywhere. I wanted this to be a nice room, somewhere you could breathe and play games in."

The room is indeed tastefully decorated, with beautiful reproduction posters of such key SNES titles as *Final Fight* and *Mario Kart* adorning the walls, along with some original Japanese flyers for the first appearances of *Metroid* and *Zelda* on the Famicom Disk System. It may only house a fraction of his whole game collection but still showcases a dizzying array of carefully curated titles. Does he really get pleasure from staring at all these box spines, we ask?

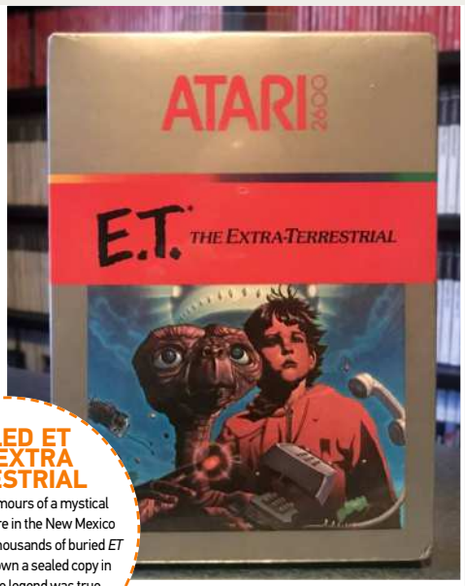
"I have this vague idea that one day, maybe in retirement, I'll get to play them all," he replies, "and if I don't buy them now, I'll never get them!" ✱

**CONTRA SPIRITS**

When it was localised in Europe as another *Probotector* game, that just wouldn't do, so I eventually picked up this original release from eBay.

PAID: £25

**Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:**
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com




### SEALED ET THE EXTRA TERRESTRIAL

When I heard rumours of a mystical landfill somewhere in the New Mexico desert containing thousands of buried *ET* carts, I hunted down a sealed copy in the hope that the legend was true. Who knew?

**PAID: £12**

### JEWEL IN THE CROWN

**STARWING CHALLENGE DAY POSTER**

■ The *Starwing* (*Star Fox*) Competition Cart is now something of a Holy Grail among collectors, but have you ever seen the official poster of the Challenge Day before? I begged for this from the staff at Dixons on the day I first flew an Arwing through those wonderful arches.

**PAID: FREE**

# BARGAIN HUNT

## Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

### PILOTWINGS

The original remains amongst the very best of SNES titles and a boxed PAL release shouldn't set you back more than **£20,** with loose copies going for as little as **£5.** The US NTSC version goes for a little more, so why not treat yourself to a boxed Japanese release, with its lovely cover art, for around **£10?**

### GARGOYLES

A loose cartridge of *Gargoyles* should set you back around **£30,** ignoring the ones for under a tenner from China which look in suspiciously good condition. Boxed copies do not surface often and can fetch up to **£130.**

### TOP GEAR

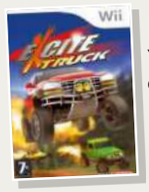
Boxed copies with instructions shouldn't set you back more than **£20** and loose copies go for just a few quid. A bundle of the original and its first sequel, boxed and in good condition, went for **£51** late last year.

### BATTLETOADS

A notoriously difficult game to play, finding a boxed PAL release isn't easy either, though one went for only **£36** a few months back. Finding a loose cartridge is not so tough – expect to pay **£25-£30.**

### SUPER MARIO 64 DS

Boxed copies can go for as little as **£5,** so even if you have the N64 original, you may want to add it to your collection, if only for the brilliant minigames.




### EXCITE TRUCK

You can pick up this Wii launch title for just **£3,** so why not create a visual timeline by displaying it alongside *Excitebike* for the NES and *Excitebike 64*?

HOW MUCH?!

### GODZILLA

Our collector Matt Taylor pointed this out as an example of rising prices. A few years after its 2015 release in the West (it's known as *Godzilla VS* in Japan), this would cost you no more than **£10** but it now regularly fetches over **£130.**

Prices correct at time of print

# MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

## X MARKS THE SPOT

### Why Darran loves Microsoft's first console

**I had absolutely no interest in the Xbox before its launch day.** In fact, I had very little interest in gaming generally and new consoles weren't really on my radar. My daughter Emily was born in 2000 and I decided that the grown up thing to do was to ditch the videogames and focus on being a dad. So that's what I did. I sacked off my N64 collection, got rid of my *Magic* cards and kept a chipped Saturn. I promised my wife I'd grow up and be a responsible adult and that's exactly what I did – for about a year, maybe 14 months. You can't change who you are and I'm someone who likes videogames. Hell, I love videogames, and along with a Game Boy Advance, I eventually added a Dreamcast to my collection and they all formed the backbone of what I currently own today.

I can still remember the moment my opinion of the Xbox changed. We'd gone to Southampton and as a result it was quite the day out for us. Southampton is only a 30-minute drive from Bournemouth, but for some reason we rarely visited, so a trip there felt quite grand, and we'd inevitably make extravagant purchases or eat out. Mel was shopping for clothes so I decided to take Emily to the Virgin store and as we approached we could see a row of Xboxes inside, highlighting a number of recently released games. They looked brilliant, particularly *Project Gotham Racing* and *Dead Or Alive 3* (I don't recall seeing Halo, but it must have been there).

Within a couple of weeks I had sold my Dreamcast and games and ordered an Xbox along with *Halo: Combat Evolved*, *Project Gotham Racing*, *Amped: Freestyle Snowboarding*, *Dead Or Alive 3*, *Rallisport Challenge* and *Jet Set Radio Future*. I was absolutely blown away, not just by the quality of the games (I still maintain it has one of the strongest launches of any console), but also by how amazing everything looked. In fact I'll go as far to say that the Xbox was the last time a console comfortably outperformed the PCs of the time.

*Dead Or Alive 3* was sensational, *Project Gotham Racing* felt like I was cruising around real-life cities, while *Amped* felt in a completely different league to *Cool Boarders* and *1080° Snowboarding*. It was *Halo* however that blew me away. It was quite simply one of the finest-looking videogames I had ever witnessed and everyone got to hear about its greatness, whether they wanted to or not. "Look at the grass," I would excitedly say to anyone within earshot, "look at the bloody bark!" I was incredibly boorish when it came to extolling the virtues of Microsoft's new console, but there was so much about it to love. And of course, I let everyone know. EVERYONE!

> "It was Halo however that blew me away. It was quite simply one of the finest-looking videogames I had ever witnessed and everyone got to hear about its greatness, whether they wanted to or not"
>
> DARRAN JONES

Granted, the promised power of the included hard drive never really lived up to Microsoft's claims (although easily adding game saves to it was cool), but being able to rip your own CDs and then listen to them in-game felt like witchcraft and it enhanced countless games I owned. (If you haven't carved down *Amped*'s mountains while listening to *Pure Moods* you haven't really lived.)

**Being a relatively early adopter meant I also benefitted from the console's early price reduction and I received two additional games (*Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee* and *Wreckless: The Yakuza Missions*) as well as a new pad.** I know a lot of people never got on with that bulky controller, but I loved it and never found it uncomfortable to use. I found myself buying countless games for the Xbox, because every game I played felt fresh and exciting. *Halo* was the real game-changer for me and I lost count of the times I completed it, as it felt like no other console game I'd experienced and my wife came to despise Saturday nights because I'd invite 15 friends over and we'd all play *Halo* in the front room until the early hours of Sunday morning.

Eventually, Mel got tired of coming downstairs to a "fucking stink pit" and those 16-player *Halo* sessions came to an end. It didn't really matter though because by then I'd discovered Xbox Live and it again opened my eyes to possibilities that I hadn't really experienced before (I'd never played PC games online much and hadn't been online with the Dreamcast, either). Microsoft was no stranger to online gaming and Xbox Live felt leagues ahead of the competition. *Project Gotham Racing 2*, *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon* (where you pressed either the black or white button to talk), *Unreal Championship*, *Links 2004* and *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast* all received heavy rotation and allowed me to experience games in a way I hadn't enjoyed before. Sony's own online efforts at the time felt laughable in comparison. For me, Xbox was simply peerless.

Many will state that the Xbox's library was anaemic compared to the PS2's and while that's certainly true to a point, there are plenty of exceptional exclusives available. I've lost many hours to titles like *Ninja Gaiden*, *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, *Halo*, *Metal Wolf Chaos*, *Amped*, *Rallisport Challenge*, *Project Gotham Racing 2* and *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* and many of them remain in my collection today. Microsoft's console may not have been perfect, but it got me personally excited about games again, so much so that I started writing Xbox reviews for the website GameStyle and we all know what happened next. Basically I probably wouldn't be where I am today without Microsoft's big chunky box. *

I COMPLETED BARBIE HORSE ADVENTURES: WILD HORSE RESCUE WITH MY DAUGHTER EMILY SO I KEEP A COPY IN MY COLLECTION.
[XBOX] SEGA'S EXIT FROM THE CONSOLE MARKET WAS XBOX'S GAIN AND IT RECEIVED MANY EXCLUSIVES LIKE JET SET RADIO FUTURE.
THERE ARE LOADS OF XBOX GAMES I LOVE, BUT THESE ARE JUST A FEW OF MY PERSONAL FAVOURITES.

[XBOX] XBOX LIVE WAS A HUGE DEAL FOR ME AND ELEVATED GREAT GAMES LIKE OUTRUN 2006: COAST 2 COAST.

## XBOX ESSENTIALS

BOOST YOUR COLLECTION WITH THESE CLASSICS

**PANZER DRAGOON ORTA**
Yes it's tougher than overcooked old boots but it's a great addition to the series and still looks incredible.

**DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE**
While the third game is also worthy of consideration, this double pack is excellent and offers plenty of brawling and spectacular visuals.

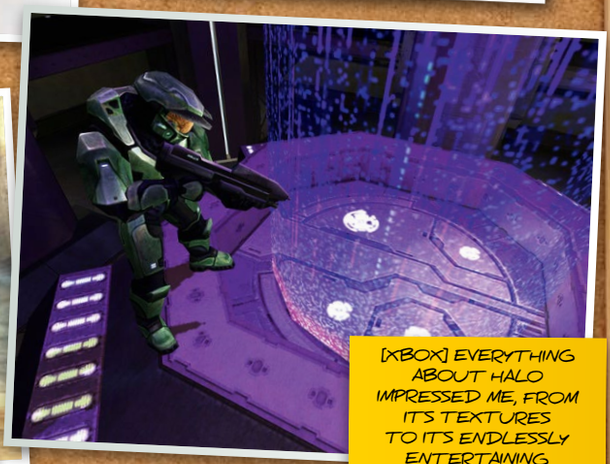
**STEEL BATTALION**
OK, it's stupidly expensive now, but you owe it to yourself to explore Capcom's unique mech simulator.

**CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH**
It's a little janky, but *Cthulhu* remains an excellent survival horror game for Microsoft's console.

**AMPED: FREESTYLE SNOWBOARDING**
This great launch title is cheap as proverbial chips and offers all sorts of fun tasks to do.

IT'S PRICEY BUT CAPCOM'S RIDICULOUS PERIPHERAL FOR STEEL BATTALION PERFECTLY SUMS UP THE XBOX FOR ME – BOLD, UNIQUE AND COMPLETELY CRAZY.

[XBOX] TECMO RELEASED SEVERAL EXCLUSIVE XBOX GAMES. NINJA GAIDEN WAS ONE OF THE BEST.



[XBOX] EVERYTHING ABOUT HALO IMPRESSED ME, FROM IT'S TEXTURES TO IT'S ENDLESSLY ENTERTAINING MULTIPLAYER MATCHES.

# REMEMBERING THE XBOX

## Readers share their favourite memories of Microsoft's console

**Linky**
Working with Microsoft on *Quantum Redshift*. Being flown out to Redmond first-class to fix last-minute bugs.

**KINGMONKEY**
Seeing it for the first time and realising what a beast of a machine it was! Ripping music CDs to the HDD to create your own in-game OSTs. Fave memory is installing XBMC; streaming video from a PC, playing MAME (& many other quality emulators) & access to 720p & 1080i display modes!

**iPlaySEGA**
*Playing Panzer Dragoon ORTA* for the very first time! It was (and still is) AWESOME!

**Mrstriding**
I was working for Microsoft (UK) at the time and we all received an Xbox at launch. Heading home from the office the day they arrived was a good day.

**The Retro Blast Podcast**
Experiencing *Halo* for the first time and four-player split-screen deathmatch with friends. Not much tops that.

**M1ND**
I'll never forget playing *Halo* for the first time and just looking down and staring at the grass in the game and thinking how real the grass looked.

**DeceptiJon**
The first moment you encounter the Flood in *Halo*.

**Lunatic skies**
I remember opening the box and being shocked by how high quality everything felt. Especially since I just picked up a GameCube a few weeks earlier.

**The LEGO Video Game Museum**
Ripping all my Prodigy CDs to the hard drive and blasting *Their Law* from the radio whilst going on a rampage in *GTA III*!

**Oppressor Hutchenson**
Memories? My six-year-old is playing *Dynasty Warriors 5* on mine right now.

**Game Man**
I will never forget hearing those weird alien sounds on the dashboard. I was home alone and I completely froze in fear when I heard it. Legit thought aliens were invading my Xbox and was terrified for the rest of the night.

**CodyDXB**
The XBMC and all the emulation awesomeness available on it.

# MAILBAG

**HAVE YOUR SAY...** SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

## WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books

## STAR LETTER

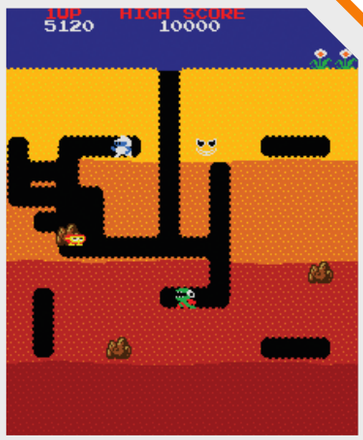
### LOST LEGENDS

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I'm getting old and I don't like it. Aside from gaining increased girth around my stomach and a loss of hair, I'm also losing the gaming legends I grew up with and it's becoming hard to deal with. I'm in my early 50s and have been enjoying games since the likes of *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* hit arcades, so I've certainly seen a lot from a gaming perspective.

As much as I love reading your magazine, the news section has made for some sobering reading lately because so many classic developers are dying. It's obviously inevitable, of course, but it doesn't make the news any less easier to deal with, particularly when the games by those talented people have given me so many years of pleasure.

Paul Woakes, Bernie Drummond, Ian Hetherington, Dave Lawson, Gordon Hall and Masayuki Uemura have all recently passed, so I was pleased to find them all celebrated on a moving tribute site by Don Daglow, another gaming legend. It's truly fantastic to see these people rightly celebrated, and it's equally saddening to learn just how many have passed away.
Yours sincerely,
James Baker

**Thanks for getting in touch, James. You're right, it has been a difficult year with a lot of great gaming legends passing, and what you've shared with us is a fitting tribute to everything they've done. Anyone interested in learning about Don Daglow's memorial project can find it by visiting www.daglowslaws.com**




» Don Daglow's website features tributes to many developers, including Namco's pixel artist Hiroshi Ono, who created sprites for games like *Galaga* and *Dig Dug*.

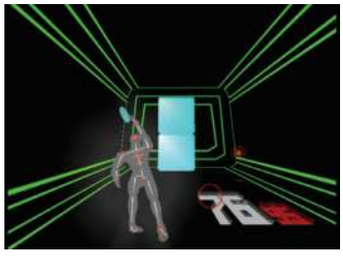
### DREAMCAST FOREVER

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
A few years back you used to run regular articles on the Top 25 Games for different systems. I was holding out for a list for my favourite system, Sega's Dreamcast, but unless I somehow missed it, I don't think it ever appeared?

The Dreamcast burned quick, but it burned oh so bright, with so many vivid, memorable games. Is there any chance you'd be able to run such a list in the future, perhaps alongside Top 25s of some of the other more modern retro systems?

While I'm here, let me wish you all a very happy and restful Christmas period too, and thank you for all your hard work and consistently excellent issues in what was a very challenging year. I can't wait to read the *Micro Machines* issue when it drops through my letterbox!
All the best,
Tim Fitches

**It's always nice to hear from a Dreamcast fan. You'll be pleased to know Tim that we did in fact run a Top 25 on Sega's console all the way back in issue 70, so it's not something we'll probably revisit any time soon. Nick loves Sega's last console so we're sure he'll make Darran reconsider another article at a later date.**



» [Dreamcast] Sega's console has some quirky games, including *Cosmic Smash*, but did it make our Top 25?

### CD WOES

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I've just discovered, quite accidentally, that you published a CD called *Rob Hubbard Remixed* with issue 192 of the magazine. I would looooooove to find this CD. I've tried searching on several websites, but to no avail so far. Can you possibly help me find this CD? It would be nothing short of awesome. Many thanks for your kind help.
Best regards,
Cyrille Rivallan

» Cyrille Rivallan is looking for our cover CD from issue 192. Can anyone help?

**Sorry Cyrille, but we have some bad news for you. While we did indeed publish this cracking CD the issue in question is no longer in stock and we've long run out of spare copies. Your best bet is to try eBay. Good luck with your search.**

### PINBALL WIZARDS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I'm a huge pinball fan and I'd love to see more coverage about them in your magazine. I appreciate that they're technically not videogames, but they were in every arcade around the world and would sit proudly next to classics like *Robotron: 2084*, *Golden Axe* and *1942*. It would be amazing if you could apply your Making Of formula to these machines and speak to the people who made them. I'd also love to see something on the many great digital pinball tables you can buy today, like *Pinball FX3* or *Pinball Arcade*. Please make it happen.
Yours hopefully,
Adrian Turner

» [PC] Zen Studios has done good work converting older Williams tables, so maybe that's a route we'll consider.

**Thanks for your letter, Adrian. Darran's a big pinball nut and we've certainly interviewed plenty of developers who have worked on classic tables, so we will consider it. We have run an article on the history of videogame pinball titles and we've chatted to Zen Studios, so maybe it's something to revisit later in the year.**

### I DREAM OF LUCY

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I don't know if this would interest your readers, but I am currently working on a retro point-and-click adventure game called *Lucy Dreaming*. Imagine *Monkey Island* crossed with *Inception* and based in a typical British suburb, with tons of hidden retro references and Easter

# CONTACT US

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» [PC] You can play a demo of *Lucy Dreaming* on Steam. Give it a try if you like old-fashioned adventure games.

eggs to get an idea of what it's like. There's a trailer available on YouTube and you can also play a demo. Myself and my wife, Emma run Tall Story Games in Shropshire. We share the writing, and I do all of the artwork and dev. Emma also provides the voice of Lucy in the game. We ran a Kickstarter campaign where we were fully funded in less than one week and raised over £25k to fund the development of the game.

Regards,

Tom Hardwidge

**Thanks for letting us know about this, Tom. It looks interesting and it's great to see you got your funding. We look forward to the finished game.**

## LOST MOJO

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Can you help me as I'm going mad. I'm trying to remember a game I used to own on my PC back in the Nineties. I'm pretty sure you played as an insect and you encountered all sorts of gruesome things like dead rats and other insects, but I can't remember for the life of me what it was called. I'd love to play it again, if only to see if it's as shocking as I remember it to be.

Chris Taylor

» [PC] Here's *Bad Mojo* in all its gory glory. We hope you don't have nightmares, Chris.

**Hi there, Chris. We're pretty confident that the game you're thinking of is *Bad Mojo*. The good news is that it's readily available to play via Steam or GOG. We hope it's as good as you remember.**

## DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

### Christmas games

**The nature of magazine deadlines means Christmas has passed, but we've all got games we're planning to play over the break. Nick is going to play on his Evercade VS and Tim's planning on finishing *Halo Infinite*. Darran's hoping to get *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, while Andy plans to work on his *Bannerlord* mod. We hope you all had a good Christmas break as well.**

# Your say

**Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…**

## What's the most technically impressive SNES game you've played?

» [SNES] As you can imagine, *Donkey Kong Country* left a big impression on a number of readers.

**Lightfoot Bros**

I think *Contra III* for me was mind-blowing at the time. It had all the elements to really show off the SNES' capabilities. Amazing set pieces, Mode 7, action, fantastic music and SFX – it put the 'Super' into Super Nintendo.

**TJ**

*Killer Instinct*. It had fluid smooth gameplay, really nice visuals and crammed pretty much all the arcade game stuff in there.

**SolasSlyM3**

For 'technical' achievement… probably *Stunt Race FX*. You have to keep in mind they didn't think the SNES could push polygons at all when they made *Star Fox*, and *Stunt Race FX* pushed more of them and faster.

**Martin**

*Super Aleste*. Incredible speed, so many sprites and no slowdown. Unreal.

**Aries**

*Star Fox* and *Donkey Kong Country* should be high on your list. When I bought these carts, I knew Nintendo had magic.

**Ethan Fox**

Honestly it was probably *F-Zero*. Though it pales compared to what came after, seeing it in previews at the time was a revelation. It was just so fast, colourful and smooth, it looked like an arcade game.

**jimbob**

*Yoshi's Island* looked absolutely beautiful – I couldn't believe it was on a SNES at the time.

**Julie Smith**

I was blown away with *Donkey Kong Country*. I thought it was unbelievable and I still love it now.

**Andy Endean**

*Star Fox/Starwing* was astonishing at the time. Nobody had ever seen 3D that fast, and with a bit of texture mapping too. It really pointed the way that games would be going in the following generation, and it helped that it was great fun too!

**OneOneTwo**

*Mega Man X3* does some pretty absurd stuff with the hardware.

**Jay Lauretta**

For me, it's *Super Metroid*. Graphically, it's still beautiful by today's standards, but what really blew my mind at the time was hearing spoken dialogue during the opening sequence.

**Grobian Gans**

I only discovered *Tales Of Phantasia* recently, but a complete song sung in a digitised voice in the intro? On SNES? Wow.

**WarrenJonHughes**

The rotating room in *Super Castlevania IV* absolutely blew me away. I never thought games would look better than that!

**BossBeaterGaming**

*Terranigma*. The sprites, animation, combat system and storyline are all uber impressive.

retro GAMER

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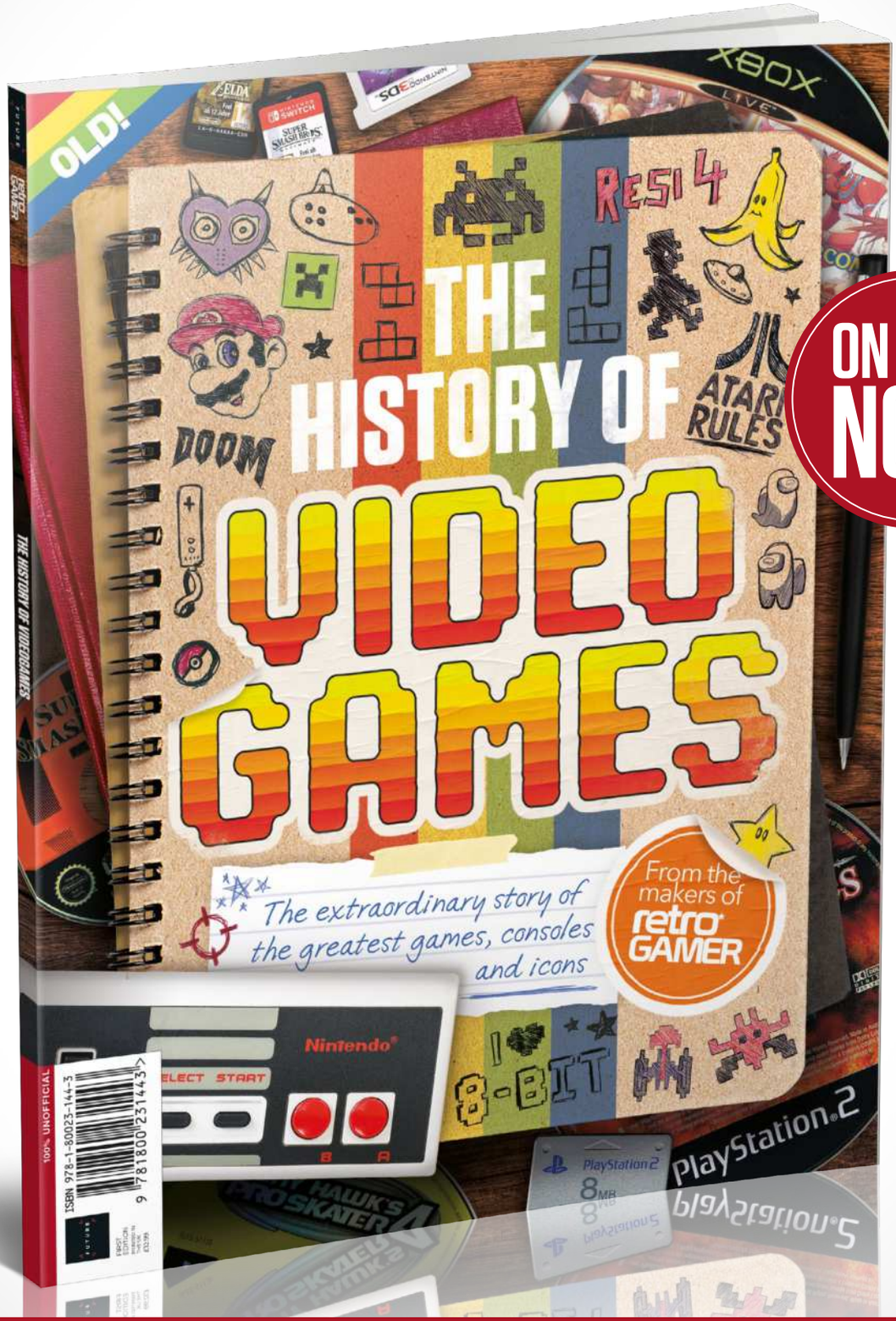


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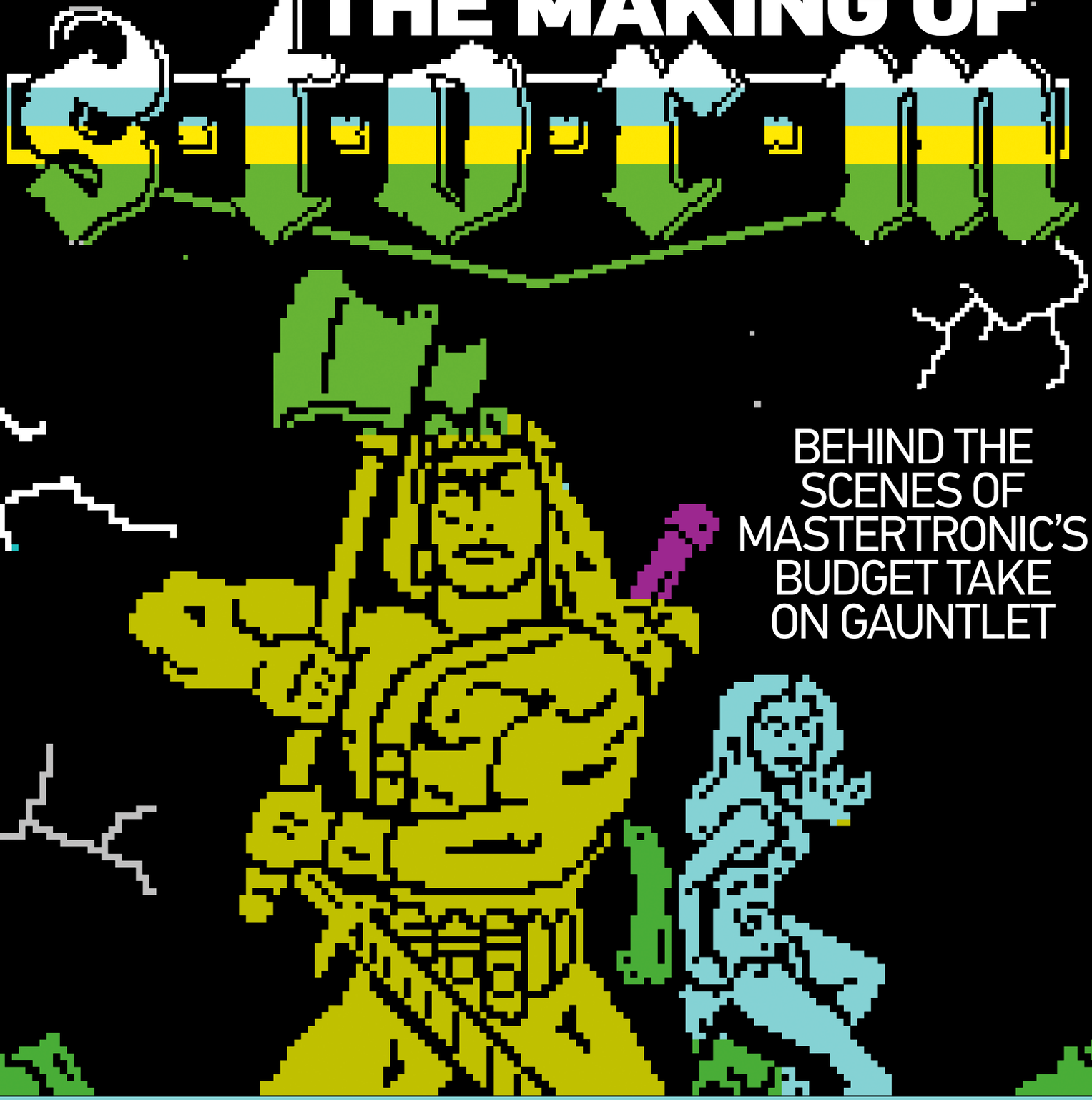

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# Excite Truck

## "SOMEBODY BETTER COME AND DRIVE ME"

» RETROREVIVAL



» WII » 2006 » MONSTER GAMES

**One of my younger sisters is now at university, and given that she was just a toddler when I left town for my own studies 15 years prior, this is a terrifying mark of the passage of time.** While it does involve glossing over the essay stress and arguments about stolen food, I do look back fondly at my time at uni, and the Wii was a big part of that. I was given mine for Christmas shortly after starting, and the focus on social games and silly waving was perfect for boozy nights in. The likes of *Wii Sports*, *Rayman: Raving Rabbids* and *Mario Kart Wii* were all popular with my housemates for obvious reasons, but I was surprised when another racing game caught on with my housemates – *Excite Truck*.

If you're not familiar with *Excite Truck*, it's a fairly simple game to explain. It's a successor to the *Excitebike* games, but this time in big trucks instead of on motorbikes, and with your steering and tilt handled by the Wii controller's motion sensitivity. Success is as much about driving stylishly as placing first, with stars awarded for things like doing massive jumps, tearing through forests and ramming other trucks. You can even collect tokens to activate terrain deformation, enabling even crazier jumps or revealing water that will cool your engine. The over-the-top nature of what you can do drew my friends in, which led to some fantastic moments. One of my favourites involved a drunken housemate who, after losing a series of multiplayer races in succession, loudly declared that he would play against an unmanned controller because he'd at least win that way. He immediately rammed the stationary rival truck, got two stars for it – one less than the non-player he faced – and rage quit.

Looking back, *Excite Truck* only got OK review scores, with the main criticism being that it was short. To me, that didn't matter – I was too busy for long, story heavy games and the multiplayer greatly increased its lifespan. Sometimes, picking the right game is all about finding the best match for your circumstances. ✱

# ENDGAME

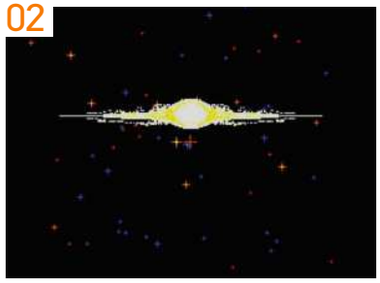
## THUNDER FORCE III

» The human race has survived a great many things over the years, from famine, plague and the threat of nuclear war to everything in between. But despite overcoming these many challenging situations, one thing we have never learnt is that if you're going to be attacked by an entire fleet of deadly aliens your best defence is to send just one or two ships against them. That ridiculous scenario is just what happens in Thunder Force III, so let's see how the pilots Jean and Shely fare.

01

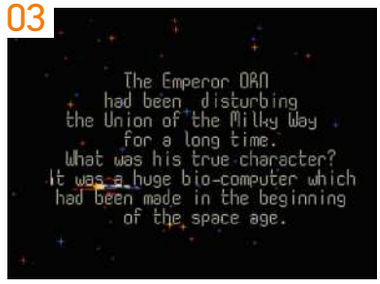
» After defeating the evil bio-computer Chas Os, Jean and Shely battle to the planet's surface and head off into space, leaving the weird mechanical-looking planet in their wake. Jean is ecstatic, but Shely feels a deep sense of unease.

02



» There's a flash of light and Orn explodes in a giant ball of spectacular fire. Jean whoops with joy and reports back to base on a job well done, but Shely can't shake a strange feeling of deja vu. How come she is so unsettled?

03


The Emperor ORN
had been disturbing
the Union of the Milky Way
for a long time.
What was his true character?
It was a huge bio-computer which
had been made in the beginning
of the space age.

» As the brave pilots head home several screens of text reveal how humans had built a supercomputer that became self aware. It would appear Jean and Shely were simply clearing up our own mess. Silly humans with their silly plans.

04

» As the pilots land, Shely suddenly realises that the reason she feels so weird is that she's experienced this battle against Orn before. Has she been reincarnated, was her mind wiped, or is she simply trapped in some weird recurring nightmare, like *Groundhog Day*, but without the benefit of Bill Murray?

05

» Despite an impending sense of doom, Shely follows Jean and joins the others. Orn is defeated and everyone can celebrate. Or can they? That might look like an inappropriate work kiss that Shely is receiving, but she's actually being informed that Orn is already beginning to amass new forces. Here we go again...

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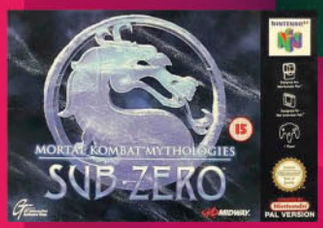


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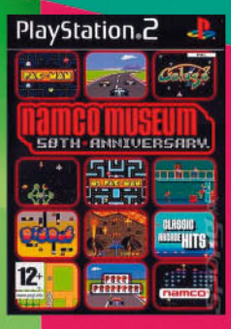


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